

**A Map of Mankind:  
Edmund Burke's Image of America in an  
Enlightened Atlantic Context**

**by  
Jeffrey O. Nelson**

**A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the University of Edinburgh  
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **Declaration Page**

I attest that the work herein submitted to the postgraduate office of the University of Edinburgh has not in any part been submitted as work for any other degree or diploma.

Furthermore, I hereby certify that for each piece of the work herein submitted, the work is the candidate's own.

Attested to by the Candidate,

This Day, Thursday, 30 August 2007,

and signed:

Jeffrey O. Nelson

PG Student 9907109



# THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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*Address :*

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This thesis re-evaluates Edmund Burke's (1730-1797) image of America by focusing on the place of colonial America in his early thought and pre-parliamentary writings. In so doing, it considers Burke's relationship to the humanist tradition, offers an appraisal of Burke's historicism, and seeks to describe the nature of his place within the Age of Enlightenment. Burke's interest in the British North American colonies emerged well before his rise to prominence as a Member of Parliament in the mid-1760s. Behind Burke's later partisan speeches was a capacious understanding of America as a European frontier with a colonial experience that also included the Spanish and the French, native inhabitants and imported slaves. His early writings are an important example of the manner in which eighteenth-century thinkers perceived that in heretofore unknown peoples and civilizations there existed an opportunity for historic comparison, as well as for working out the complex implications of particularity and universality. They suggest a way in which "the reception of America," according to David Armitage, by figures like Burke can help us to see "what uses America had within earlier intellectual projects and to what extent America shaped their distinctive features." This thesis is foremost an attempt to explore the ways in which America provided the young Burke with material that enlarged his mental horizons and fashioned his distinctive historical and political thought. Finally, the thesis seeks to make scholarly contributions to studies on the place of America in the European consciousness and to the concept of Atlantic History.

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We can feel for others, whilst we suffer ourselves.

—Edmund Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757)

A nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.

—*Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775)

I have always thought with you that we possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge of human Nature. We need no longer go to History to trace it in all its stages and periods.... [N]ow the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same time instant under our View.

—Edmund Burke to William Robertson (1777)

I was an Irishman in the Irish business, just as much as I was an American, when on the same principles, I wished you to concede to America, at a time when she prayed concession at our feet.

—*Speech at Bristol Previous to Election* (1780)

I do not know why I should not include America among the European Powers; because she is of European origin, and has not yet, like France, destroyed all traces of manners, laws, opinions, and usages which she drew from Europe. ...America, even separated as it is by the ocean,...must be considered as a part of the European system.

—*Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795)



## Introduction

### Burke's America in an Enlightened Atlantic Context

Edmund Burke's (1730-1797) standing as an interpreter of European history and affairs is well-established. His friends and his foes agree that his assessments of French, Irish, and British imperial affairs were well-informed and thoughtful. What is less often appreciated is Burke's knowledge and judgment of the Western Hemisphere. Long before he wrote the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and even prior to his celebrated speeches on American affairs in the mid-1770s, Burke devoted countless hours of study to North America: its geography, ethnography, history, and politics. Indeed, Burke's early writings on North America should establish him as one of the first progenitors of what is now known as Atlantic History or Studies.

This thesis re-evaluates Burke's image of America by focusing on the place of colonial America in his early thought and pre-parliamentary writings. In so doing, it considers Burke's relationship to the humanist tradition, offers an appraisal of Burke's historicism, and situates his thought in the Age of Enlightenment. Burke's interest in the British North American colonies emerged well before his rise to prominence as a Member of Parliament in the mid-1760s. Behind Burke's later partisan speeches was a capacious understanding of America as a European frontier, which included not only British settlers, but also the Spanish and the French, native inhabitants and African slaves. His early writings are an important example of the manner in which eighteenth-century thinkers perceived that in heretofore unknown peoples and civilizations there existed an opportunity for historic comparison, as well as for working out the complex implications of particularity and universality. They suggest a way in which "the reception of America," according to David Armitage, by such figures as Burke can help us to see "what uses America had within earlier intellectual projects and to what extent America

shaped their distinctive features.”<sup>1</sup> This thesis is foremost an attempt to explore the ways in which America provided the young Burke with material that enlarged his mental horizons and helped to fashion his distinctive historical and political thought. Finally, the thesis seeks to make scholarly contributions to the literature on the place of America in the European consciousness and to the concept of Atlantic History.

Contrary to the argument in the ensuing pages of this thesis, the American historian Ross J. S. Hoffman (1902-1979) concluded that “Burke had no natural sympathy for America. . . . There was in him not a trace of sentimental pro-Americanism—and his indignation at ministerial mismanagement of the colonies had always been a great deal warmer than his sympathy for their grievances.”<sup>2</sup> The Irish historian and diplomat, Conor Cruise O’Brien (1917- ), modifies this argument, contending that Burke’s apparent lack of natural sympathy for America held true for the “pre-war” phase only. Once fighting began in 1775, O’Brien believes that “Burke’s emotions were strongly aroused, on the side of the colonists. . . .”<sup>3</sup> The English historian of the eighteenth-century North Atlantic world, J. C. D. Clark (1951- ), insists that little in Burke’s writings or speeches before 1775 “bore on America.”<sup>4</sup> Curiously, Hoffman, O’Brien, and Clark were all silent about Burke’s pre-parliamentary fascination with colonial British North America and about his theoretical and historical investigations into the conquest and settlement of the Americas in general. There was, however, also a personal attraction: for a period of several years (as will be documented), from 1755 until as late as 1761, Burke thought very seriously about emigrating. Although it appears that his father thwarted this move, the ensuing chapters will chart the ways in which well before his famous political career Burke did intellectually migrate to America.

This thesis, the first study of Burke’s earliest view of America and its relationship to his overall thought and historical sense, thus calls into question the claims that Burke felt no “natural sympathy” for the colonies. An analysis of his early life, career, correspondence, political writings, and speeches up to the time of his election to

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<sup>1</sup> David Armitage, “The New World and British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson,” in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, edited, *America in European Consciousness: 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent* (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 181, 191.

<sup>3</sup> Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (London, 1992), p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> J.C.D. Clark, “Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in America (1777): the emergence of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary positions in late eighteenth-century England,” in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia, MO, 2004), p. 79.



Parliament in 1766 reveals the degree to which Burke's sympathy for the British colonists in America and their grievances was real, deeply rooted, and continuous. To a considerable extent, Burke's mind tacked toward American ports *before* rebellion broke out in the colonies. This movement was a natural development for Burke, who saw America through Irish eyes. His sympathies for colonial British North America during the revolutionary years were thus an extension of his sympathies for an Ireland sundered by penal laws imposed by a Protestant minority on the Catholic majority, as well as by oppressive cultural and economic policies of the metropolitan center of the Empire aimed at both extending and protecting British interests at the expense of Ireland. In many ways, his writings on America reveal Burke at his best: coolly critical and yet warmly empathetic. It is a balance he does not so consistently achieve in his other major works on India, Ireland, or France.

The font of Burke's political thought was history. In an essay entitled, "'Friends of America': British Sympathy with the American Revolution," H. T. Dickinson (1939- ) notes that a profound understanding of colonial British America informed Burke's "great speeches attacking Lord North and calling for the conciliation of the American colonies." He then adds: "Burke had carefully researched the subject and he was more conscious than most British politicians that the colonies had developed a different political, social and economic culture."<sup>5</sup> It was not Dickinson's objective in the essay to explore just how, or when, or in what context and with what impact on his emerging political thought that Burke "carefully researched the subject" of America's British colonial history. It is, however, the object of this thesis.

Burke's personal and historical interest in Britain's American colonies long before he began a career in politics, first as the secretary to the statesman William Gerard Hamilton's (1729-1796), and then later as Lord Rockingham's secretary (Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Rockingham, 1730-1782). His mature interest in America was rooted in his Irish youth and in the economic, educational, historical, political, and religious condition of his extended family. After leaving Dublin for London in 1750, this interest deepened and manifested itself during a period in the mid-1750s and early 1760s as Burke seriously considered emigrating to the colonies. At this time, Burke

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<sup>5</sup> H. T. Dickinson, "'Friends of America': British Sympathy with the American Revolution," in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848: Essays in Honour of Malcolm I. Thomis*, ed. Michael T. Davis (London, 2000), p. 17.

aspired to become a writer, and, significantly, his first historical work was an extended study of the Spanish, French, and English New World: *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757).<sup>6</sup> There are also hints of his image of America in his other early historical and philosophical writings, including *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History* (begun in the late 1750s). Moreover, his journalism in the first ten years of *The Annual Register* (1758-1767) included regular treatments of contemporary developments in the American colonies.

Burke began to attain his detailed knowledge of America while collaborating with his friend and “cousin,” William Burke (1728-1798), on the two-volume *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Published anonymously by Dodsley in April of 1757, the *Settlements* was attributed initially to William, but has long been held substantially to represent the views and direct input of Edmund. His mature ideas about imperial relations with the American colonies and his views on the centrality of trade policy and traditions of freedom to the relations between the colonies and the mother country are already apparent in this work. A neglected text in the Burke corpus,<sup>7</sup> this work, which contemporaries praised, developed lines of inquiry that anticipated more celebrated works by Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), William Robertson, and Adam Smith (1723-1790). *The Settlements* is thus a pivotal text for establishing the nature and continuity of Burke’s image of America with his later and more famous speeches on American affairs, as well as an important source for Burke’s attempt to work out a hermeneutic to apply to his historical studies.

The middle chapters of this thesis will be based on a close reading of the Burkes’ *Account of the European Settlements in America* and of the relevant material in his early correspondence, notebook, journalism, and other published and unpublished writings prior to his election to Parliament. Burke’s historical mapping of America commenced with these publications, each of which helped to inform and mold his understanding of empire, and from it, his principled and historical analysis of the nature of the colonial crises in the 1760s and 1770s.

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<sup>6</sup> *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, in Two Volumes, (London, 1777, Sixth Edition). This edition will be used throughout. It was reprinted by Arno Press (1972) as part of the “Research Library of Colonial America,” eds., Richard C. Robey, Jack P. Greene, Edmund S. Morgan, and Alden T. Vaughn.

<sup>7</sup> An analysis of questions concerning Burke and this text appears in chapter two.

In his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, T. Robert Malthus (1766-1834) on several occasions cites *An Account of the European Settlements in America* as a source for his analysis of population and emigration trends of both the Native and European Americans. In his footnotes, Malthus refers to the work simply as “Burke’s America.”<sup>8</sup> Malthus’ shorthand title for this work is better than the original. It captures in a striking image Burke’s personal engagement with American history and construction of its meaning.

## I

In 1750, twenty-year-old Edmund Burke left Ireland for England to study law and pursue a legal and literary vocation. Burke’s move from Dublin to London, from adolescence to maturity, and, ultimately, from law and literature to politics took place amidst the intellectual transformation of the European societies that composed the North Atlantic world. R. R. Palmer (1909-2002) famously identified this reordering as “the age of the democratic revolution” (1760-1800).<sup>9</sup> From another perspective, J. C. D. Clark characterizes this period as marking the eclipse of the *ancien régime*, which began after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and ended in the revolutionary tumult of France in 1789.<sup>10</sup> For Britain, it was an age of imperial growth and consolidation, followed by the unexpected rupture of the Empire in the North Atlantic. This time of change, crisis, national dissolution and formation, and democratic revolution made an enormous impact on the historiography of the mid- to late-eighteenth century. It decisively affected Burke’s historical mind, and the ripples of its impact continue to shape historical thinking in our own day.

In fashioning his interpretation of America, Burke operated on the intellectual frontiers of his generation, and perhaps of ours. He recognized the white, principally Protestant, North American people as the “children” of Europe, but also understood that children deeply affect the destinies of their parents, and will effect changes, often unanticipated for both sets of relations.<sup>11</sup> Although he viewed America as a frontier of

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<sup>8</sup> T. Robert Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population*, Sixth Edition (London, 1826). See Book One, chapter iv, notes 34, 43, 55, 117, and 134; and Book Three, chapter iv, notes 14, 15, and 16.

<sup>9</sup> R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, two volumes (Princeton, 1959 and 1964).

<sup>10</sup> J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Régime*, second revised edition (Cambridge, 2000), and *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Burke: “The Americans are our children....” See *Speech on American Taxation* in *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, volume II, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, 1981), p. 459.

Europe, he also knew that America was part of the larger European family and would exercise its own influence on its collective destiny. In this way, Burke was both a forerunner and an exemplar for contemporary scholars seeking to explain the dynamic political history of the Atlantic World. He anticipated what such twentieth-century scholars as Bernard Bailyn (1922- ), J. H. Elliott (1935- ), Jack P. Greene (1931- ), Nicholas Canny (1944- ), J. G. A. Pocock (1924- ), and others have called “Atlantic History.”<sup>12</sup>

According to J. H. Elliott, “The new Atlantic history might be defined as the history, in the broadest sense, of the creation, destruction and re-creation of communities as a result of the movement, across and around the Atlantic basin, of people, commodities, cultural practices, and ideas. It is not the history of the advent—or non-advent—of modernity. . . but rather of change and continuity in the face of new experiences, new circumstances, new contacts, and new environments.”<sup>13</sup> For Elliott and others, Atlantic history is thus at bottom an approach to early modern history that resists a teleological reading of the period as the inevitable movement toward enlightenment, revolution, and democracy.

An essential tenet of the historiography of the Atlantic world is that the writing of American colonial history should be comparative and connective rather than isolated and exclusive.<sup>14</sup> To encourage this perspective, David Armitage has proposed a useful typology of Atlantic history characterized by three scholarly tendencies: 1) Circum-Atlantic History, or the history of the zones throughout the Atlantic World that were central to the exchange or interchange of ideas, goods, and culture; 2) Trans-Atlantic

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” *Itinerario*, Vol. XX No. 1, 1996, pp. 19-44; and Nicholas Canny, “Writing Atlantic History; or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 86 No. 3 (December 1999), pp. 1093-1114. See also *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York, 2002), especially the preface by Bernard Bailyn, pp. xiv-xx, and “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” by David Armitage, pp. 11-27; Jack P. Greene, “Beyond Power: Paradigm Subversion and Reformulation and the Re-Creation of the Early Modern Atlantic World,” in *Interpreting Early America: Historiographical Essays* (Charlottesville, VA, 1996), p. 17-42; and J.G.A. Pocock, “British History: A Plea for a New Subject,” *Journal of Modern History* 47 (December 1975), p. 606; “The New British History in Atlantic Perspective: An Antipodean Commentary,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume 104 Number 2 (April 1999), pp. 490-500; and, of course, his best known work: *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), especially pp. 506ff. Recently, Bailyn re-worked his essays on the idea of Atlantic history into a small volume, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass, and London, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> J. H. Elliott, “Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Bailyn, “Preface,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. xiv.

History, or the comparative, international history of lands and peoples across the Atlantic as nations and/or regions joined within a more or less coherent oceanic system and possessed of a set of more or less common experiences that established their connection; and 3) Cis-Atlantic History, or the study of places and locations on “this side” of the ocean as “unique locations within the Atlantic world” that are defined by a dynamic interaction between a local and universal Atlantic culture.<sup>15</sup> In general, Burke would have agreed especially with the second tendency, for he regarded the history of colonial North and South America as a properly transatlantic subject.

The Atlantic historians are not the first to proceed from such assumptions. The Imperial School of Charles M. Andrews (1863-1943), Herbert L. Osgood (1855-1918), Clarence Haring (1885-1960), and Lawrence Henry Gipson (1880-1971);<sup>16</sup> the Exploration and Discovery School that included Samuel E. Morison (1887-1976) and David Beers Quinn (1909-2002); and the Democratic Revolution School of Jacques Godechot (1907-1989) and R. R. Palmer<sup>17</sup> were in many important respects the founders of the school of Atlantic History.<sup>18</sup> However, what recent Atlantic historians learned from their forebears they have developed and integrated into a more capacious, more comprehensive, and more institutionalized program of study.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Armitage, “Three Concepts,” pp.15-25.

<sup>16</sup> Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History*, revised edition (New Haven, 1931), and *The Colonial Period in American History*, four volumes (New Haven, 1934-1938); Herbert L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century*, four volumes (New York, 1924); Clarence Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1947); Lawrence H. Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution*, fifteen volumes (New York, 1936-1970), and his one-volume study, *The Coming of the Revolution: 1763-1775* (New York, 1954). Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York, 1946), *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (New York, 1956), and *The European Discovery of America*, two volumes (New York, 1971-1974); David Beers Quinn, *Raleigh and the British Empire* (London, 1947), *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca, 1966), and *England and the Discovery of America: 1481-1620* (New York, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1779-1799* (New York, 1965); and R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*. For both Godechot and Palmer, colleagues and collaborators for a time at Princeton University, the Atlantic Ocean was the common denominator or key element linking disruptions and revolts in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Switzerland, Italy, and France in the late eighteenth century. They did much of the spadework that forms the foundations of Atlantic History.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Bailyn and David Armitage each acknowledge parts of this genealogy. See Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” pp. 20-21, 24-29, Armitage, “Three Concepts,” pp. 14-15.

<sup>19</sup> Bailyn applauds the “institutionalization” of this approach in the form of Harvard University’s now annual International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, the American Historical Association’s prize for books in Atlantic history, its international appeal and teaching opportunities that “specify Atlantic history as a desired specialty,” etc. See his “Preface,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. xiv, and *Atlantic History*, pp. 3-4.



A transitional phrase, which historians of North America still often use, that preceded the designation “Atlantic history,” was “colonial British America.” Jack P. Greene popularized the label as an alternative to such categories as “early American history,” which he and others viewed as insufficiently expansive to take into account that North American societies on the Atlantic coast settled by the English in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were extensions of English society and ought to be studied within the framework of English history.<sup>20</sup> An important transatlantic corollary among historians engaged in this project was the importance of situating “the political thought of the more articulate members of American colonial society within the spectrum of the political ideas that prevailed throughout the British dominions. . . .”<sup>21</sup> According to Nicholas Canny, however, a weakness in the concept of colonial British America was its near total emphasis on “Englishness” as characteristic of colonial society—a weakness that became especially glaring in the case of Dutch, Scots, Irish, Welsh, French, Swedish, German, or Spanish settlers, to say nothing of Indians and Africans.<sup>22</sup> Historians began to be leery of a “colonial history” which limited itself to thirteen colonies linked by their later history. Hence, the impetus for the rise of an “Atlantic” school of history that studied the “peopling” of British North America, as Bailyn put it, within the wider context of the European connections with Africa and the European conquest and settlement of the New World.<sup>23</sup>

As early as 1970, J. H. Elliott advised that, “America and Europe should not be subjected to a historiographical divorce, however shadowy their partnership may often appear before the later seventeenth century.”<sup>24</sup> Elliott believed that the histories of America and Europe constituted a continuous interplay of two themes: first, “the attempt of Europe to impose its own image, its own aspirations, and its own values, on a newly-discovered world” and, second, “the way in which a growing awareness of the character, the opportunities and the challenges represented by. . . America helped to shape and transform an Old World. . . .”<sup>25</sup> Following upon this insight, Elliott, Bailyn, and others

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<sup>20</sup> See Greene and Pole, *Colonial British America*, “Reconstructing British-American Colonial History: An Introduction,” pp. 1-17. See also, Canny, “Writing Atlantic History,” p. 1099.

<sup>21</sup> Canny, “Writing Atlantic History,” p. 1097.

<sup>22</sup> Canny, “Writing Atlantic History,” pp. 1100-1102.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction* (New York, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, England, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*, p. 7. Elliott believed that the first theme traditionally received the most attention, and that “the second is in need of more historical attention than the first.”

encouraged historical writing that aimed to advance scholarship related to, in Bailyn's words, "the common, comparative, and interactive aspects of the history of the peoples of the Atlantic world."<sup>26</sup>

Burke's method of mapping America and its relation to England and Europe could be described justly in similar words. For in his earliest historical survey, Burke sought to, in Elliott's words, "relate the European response to the non-European world to the general history of European civilization and ideas."<sup>27</sup> The Scottish historian William Robertson (1721-1793) noted at the outset of his extended *History of America*, that it was only in the seventeenth century that "the manners of the [American] inhabitants attracted, in any considerable degree, the attention of philosophers. At length they discovered that the contemplation of the condition and character of the Americans, in their original state, tended to complete our knowledge of the human species; might enable us to fill up a considerable chasm in the history of its progress...."<sup>28</sup> In a congratulatory letter to Robertson, Burke articulated the general view of their age that for the first time the whole of human history was visible, and that as such a comparative account of the relation of native non-European peoples to European civilization could be undertaken. "I have always thought with you," Burke told Robertson, "that we possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge of human Nature. We need no longer go to History to trace it in all its stages and periods.... [N]ow the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no state or Gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same time instant under our View."<sup>29</sup> By mentally crossing the Atlantic Ocean and studying the origins of peoples and cultures, early modern Europeans like Burke and Robertson were attempting to understand themselves and their civilization.

Thus it is not entirely anachronistic to posit that Burke was an Atlanticist or, at the very least, an eighteenth-century forerunner who was so precisely because he was also fundamentally a Europeanist. He viewed the history of the Atlantic archipelago—that is, of Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales—as a continuation of the history and culture of continental Europe. Just as England was, therefore, a great resource for Europe and its

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard Bailyn, "Preface," in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Elliott, *The Old World and the New*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> William Robertson, *The History of the Discovery and Settlement of America*, three volumes (London, 1777); single volume edition (New York, 1855), Book IV, p. 139.

<sup>29</sup> Burke to Robertson, 9 June 1777, *Correspondence*, vol. III, pp. 350-351.

future,<sup>30</sup> he believed that America was a great resource for England and the prospects of European civilization. Indeed, he believed America was an integral part of the “European System,” or what he called the “Commonwealth of Europe.”<sup>31</sup> It is just such an “interactive” approach that contemporary Atlanticists advocate. From our present vantage point, however, it is easy to overlook just how novel this perspective was in the eighteenth century.

Denys Hay (1915-1994), Christopher Dawson (1889-1970), and others have demonstrated how historically recent is the idea of Europe.<sup>32</sup> “‘Europe’ is a peculiarly modern concept,” Dawson observed.<sup>33</sup> It emerged at approximately the same time as “America” was discovered and idealized, or as some historians have argued, “invented” or conceived.<sup>34</sup> The discovery of America, a landmass with native peoples and civilizations heretofore completely unknown, was a shock to the European consciousness, to say nothing of Christian cosmography.<sup>35</sup> In a penetrating monograph, Hay mapped the antecedents of the idea of Europe in the eighteenth century—an idea rooted first in mythology and then, successively, in geographical, political, spiritual, and cultural terms. Hay emphasized the conceptual shifts that occurred in the transition from the Roman Empire to the world of Christendom in the ninth century to the time when the “European mind,” as Paul Hazard put it,<sup>36</sup> was forged in the late-sixteenth, seventeenth, and early-eighteenth centuries. It was during this time that the Middle Ages passed into the early Modern era and a new consciousness emerged with it—the consciousness of Europe.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Burke: “[T]he great resource of Europe was in England. Not in a sort of England detached from the rest of the world...but in that sort of England, who considered herself as embodied with Europe....” *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, WS, IX.

<sup>31</sup> For Burke’s use of “European System,” “system of Europe,” or “Commonwealth of Europe,” as well as Burke on America’s place in this “system” or “Commonwealth,” see appendix of this thesis.

<sup>32</sup> See Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (New York, 1966—originally published Edinburgh, 1957); Oscar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (New York, 1950); Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (New York, 1952), as well as his essay “Europe in Eclipse” in *Dynamics of World History* (London, 1956), pp. 405-412; John Lukacs, *Decline and Rise of Europe: A Study in Recent History, with Particular Emphasis on the Development of a European Consciousness* (New York, 1965); and most recently, Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Woodrow Wilson Center and Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Dawson, “Europe in Eclipse,” p. 406.

<sup>34</sup> Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1961).

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of this see J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New 1492-1650* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Hazard, *The European Mind: 1680-1715* (New York, 1963).

<sup>37</sup> Hay puts it well: “Christendom slowly entered the limbo of archaic words and Europe emerged as the unchallenged symbol of the largest human loyalty.” *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, p. 116. The transition from the idea of Christendom to the idea of Europe, from the cultural/religious idea of Medieval times to the political state system of Burke’s time, was nearly complete by the time he began thinking about



This emerging consciousness, John Lukacs has argued persuasively, was at first possessed only by the educated elite and cosmopolitan travelers, not by the *peoples* that comprised the European population. Furthermore, the initial consciousness of Europe, and the adjective “European,” principally reflected a *political* conception of the incipient European state system. A consciousness of the *cultural* idea of Europe was slower to develop.<sup>38</sup> Burke was among the few eighteenth-century thinkers who located the political idea of Europe in a prior understanding of European cultural unity. Burke’s evolving historical consciousness and his study of the Americas enabled him to understand the complex relations between the Old World and the New as few others did.

Unfortunately, in recent times there has often been a historiographical divorce between America and Europe. Atlantic history as a framework for historical scholarship has, from its origins in the 1940s, attempted to reconcile such a breakup and overcome the problems associated with the distorted image of Europe projected through so much American writing during the past two centuries.<sup>39</sup> Burke’s appropriative role in this effort arose largely because he has been an intellectual touchstone throughout American history, one friendly to American grievances against arbitrary colonial rule as well as an articulate defender of the deeper cultural and European traditions that he believed fundamentally to bind the transatlantic nations.<sup>40</sup>

In this sense the Atlantic context of Burke’s America is crucial. Following the analysis of J. H. Elliott and others, the Atlantic Ocean was for both Burke and Britain’s American colonists simultaneously a “unifying” and “connecting” element and a “divisive” and “fragmenting” factor.<sup>41</sup> Distance combined with Burke’s understanding

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Ireland, America, England, and Europe in the 1740s and 1750s. His frequent interchange of the terms “Christendom” and “Europe” throughout his writings highlights the transitional character of this period. See *Letters on a Regicidal Peace*, WS, IX, *Fourth Letter on a Regicidal Peace*, pp. 50, 60.

<sup>38</sup> See John Lukacs, *Decline and Rise of Europe*, pp. 139–170. On the other hand, coast peoples like Burke’s fellow Irish, the Scots, the western French, the Portuguese and Spaniards, the Cornish and Welsh, were always inclined to think in Atlantic terms, often much more so than in terms of their country’s capital cities (unless, like Lisbon, it was on the ocean). From a coast perception, internal communications were often slower and more hazardous than those by sea in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world.

<sup>39</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the nature of this historiographical divorce and consequent distorted image, see Daniel J. Boorstin, *America and the Image of Europe: Reflections on American Thought* (New York, 1960).

<sup>40</sup> See chapter seven for an analysis of the place of Burke in the conceptual development of Atlantic history.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Elliott, “Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, pp. 239–240: “Both the change and continuity only become understandable if set into the context of an Atlantic that is seen as at once a unifying element, connecting peoples and events across the great expanses of ocean, and a divisive element, fragmenting and distancing communities through space and time, and promoting, in a multiplicity of different environments, a whole spectrum of responses.”

and experience of both Irish and English history combined to forge his image of America—an image that was more hospitable to colonial grievances than his English audience may have appreciated while, at the same time, was a more limited form of “friendship” than his American appropriators would understand. In this regard, a kind of “portrait biography”<sup>42</sup> of Edmund Burke emerges in this thesis, the freshness of which consists in its framework and the background—namely, colonial-minded Britain and revolutionary America.

From a close reading of Burke’s earliest writings it is evident that he viewed America as a frontier of Europe and, therefore, situated the rise of the British North American colonies within the context of a wider history of conquest and settlement during the two decades before his employment with Lord Rockingham. In our age, Ross Hoffman sought to study American history as an extension of Atlantic history. He believed Burke was the best model for such an endeavor.<sup>43</sup> Bernard Bailyn himself agrees at least with Hoffman’s approach, presenting as he does Atlantic history as “a deeply embedded part of early modern history” and therefore “peculiarly relevant for understanding the present.”<sup>44</sup>

Oddly, there has been no single work considering Burke’s own study of America in this more comprehensive and connective Atlantic context. This thesis is an attempt to give an account of the place America and the New World had in Burke’s developing thought prior to his embarking on a career as a politician, first with Hamilton and then with Rockingham. According to Fordham University political theorist Francis Canavan, a dean of Burke studies in America, “Monographs on the major areas of Burke’s political concern...are surprisingly few.” For instance, “there is no monograph concerning Burke on America....”<sup>45</sup> Of late, however, there have been several good works on Burke and Ireland,<sup>46</sup> and studies of Burke and India have also begun to appear.<sup>47</sup> Burke’s writings on

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<sup>42</sup> I am indebted to Elizabeth R. Lambert for pointing out the existence of this category and to her own employment of it with regard to Burke’s domestic life in her recent work, *Edmund Burke of Beaconsfield* (Newark, DE: 2003), p. 13. She attributes the term “portrait biography” to Leon Edel, who employs it in his book *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York, 1984), pp. 175, 177-181.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix for a discussion of Burke’s place in the concept of Atlantic history.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Select Works*, IV, p. 288.

<sup>46</sup> For Burke and Ireland see, Thomas Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (1960); Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (1996); Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (2003); Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke*, Field Day Essays, Vol. 15 (2005); and of course, Conor Cruise O’Brien’s *The Great Melody*. R. B.

France in the aftermath of the French Revolution provoked one of the greatest political debates in English history. Numerous monographs have been penned outlining the pamphlet replies to Burke's French writings; one writer has pointed out that more than 225 of the 1,086 pamphlets published in England between 1789 and 1793 dealt with the controversy over the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.<sup>48</sup> The interest in Burke and France has been continuous ever since.<sup>49</sup> The existence of comparatively few scholarly monographs dedicated to Burke's American writings is attested to by the rather dramatic fact that of the 1,614 entries in *Edmund Burke: A Bibliography of Secondary Studies to 1982* only 37 are related to America.<sup>50</sup> Given the total amount of scholarly work devoted to Burke and the relative importance of America in Burke's political career and thought, this scarcity is surprising—all the more so given the growth of interest in Burke since World War II.

American editions of Burke's works have been readily available since the 1770s when American presses began publishing his speeches.<sup>51</sup> The project of collecting and publishing his writings was begun in 1792 by Burke's literary executors and volunteer assistants, French Laurence (1757-1809) and Rev. Walker King (1751-1827), and completed and published by J. Dodsley in 1827. Prior to that authorized edition, six

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McDowell holds a distinguished place among writers on Burke and Ireland and is the editor of the volume of Burke's Irish writings in the new Oxford press edition of Burke's works.

<sup>47</sup> For Burke and India, the best single treatment is by Frederick Whelan, *Burke and India* (1996). Two of P. J. Marshall's projected three volumes devoted to Burke and India have been published in the Oxford edition of Burke's writings and speeches. There are also substantial considerations of Burke and India in Sara Sulieri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992), esp. pp. 24-48, Uday Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought* (1999), esp. pp. 153-190.

<sup>48</sup> See Gayle T. Pendleton, "The English Pamphlet Literature of the Age of the French Revolution Anatomized," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, volume 5, 1978, pp. 29-37.

<sup>49</sup> Of most significance during the past half-century is Steven Blakemore, ed., *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays* (1992); Blakemore, *Intertextual War: Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (1997); Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the French Revolution* (1964); Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832* (1988). Rumold R. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man* (1963); Michael Freeman, *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism* (1980); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: Burke to Santayana* (1953); F. P. Lock, *Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1985); Conor Cruise O'Brien, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York, 1969); Frank O'Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution* (1967); Frank M. Turner, ed., *Reflections on the Revolution in France with New Critical Essays* (2003); and John Whale, ed., *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (2000).

<sup>50</sup> Based on my own tabulations from studies noted in Clara I. Gandy and Peter J. Stanlis, eds., *Edmund Burke: A Bibliography of Secondary Studies to 1982* (New York, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> See William B. Todd's *A Bibliography of Edmund Burke* for dates and publishers of eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century American editions of his speeches. The first to be printed by an American publisher was his *Speech on American Taxation* by J. Rivington in New York and B. Towne in Philadelphia, both in 1775.

volumes of an American edition of Burke's works were published in Boston in 1806 by John West and O. C. Greenleaf and in New York by Eastman, Kirk and Company with further volumes appearing through 1813. The Boston firm of Wells and Lilly published an edition of his writings in seven volumes in 1826.<sup>52</sup> In 1806, S. F. Sanford of Philadelphia published the first American edition of Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. The first American edition of *An Account of the European Settlements* appeared in 1835; it was also the first edition explicitly to attach Edmund Burke's name to the work.<sup>53</sup> Shortly thereafter, the best and still most often referred to American edition of Burke's writings was released by the great American book publishers Charles Coffin Little (1799-1869) and James Brown (1800-1855) in nine volumes in 1839. The revised edition of 1865-1867 increased to twelve volumes; several revised editions appeared thereafter through 1901.<sup>54</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with America* became a set text in the American high school curriculum. Between 1884 and 1932 there were twenty-three different American editions of that speech, most of them enjoying multiple printings.<sup>55</sup> This popularity was due largely to Burke's reputation as a friend of America, who also happened to be one of the great rhetoricians and writers of the eighteenth century. Burke's speech could thus reinforce the prevailing image that Americans had of their country at the time of the Revolution, while, at the same time, instructing students in sentence structure and the elements of speech. A popular edition edited by Howard Bement illustrated this image and use: "All patriotic youth in America should feel an immediate interest in the life and work of Edmund Burke. An Irishman by birth, an Englishman by adoption, a citizen of the world by instinct, a defender of America by choice, he possesses for us today a singular fascination."<sup>56</sup>

Given the continuous interest in Burke's writings on the American colonies, it is all the more surprising that relatively little academic attention has been given them. Scholarly writing on Burke and America can be divided into four distinct but related areas of concentration: British imperial politics and the American Revolution; Burke's

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>53</sup> Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (Boston, 1835).

<sup>54</sup> Two volumes on America have been published in Oxford's *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, both edited by Paul Langford.

<sup>55</sup> The best list of these editions was compiled by Naomi Townsend in her doctoral dissertation, *Edmund Burke: Reputation and Bibliography, 1850-1954*, University of Pittsburgh, 1955.

<sup>56</sup> *Burke's Speech on Conciliation*, ed. Howard Bement (New York, 1922), p. 11.

role within the Rockingham Whig Party and in fashioning new ideas about party more generally; Burke's concept of empire; and the nature of his advocacy of the American cause and condemnation of the King and Ministry during the Revolutionary era, both as Rockingham Whig and as London agent for the colonial assembly of New York. Taking briefly into consideration each of these categories can be an instructive way to orient the reader and help to situate the preceding thesis in the secondary literature on Burke, to demonstrate its originality, and to distinguish it from other scholarship dedicated in some fashion to Burke's American writings.

As would be expected, the largest body of secondary literature on Burke and America situates his American writing in the context of the "Age of the American Revolution," as Carl B. Cone put it.<sup>57</sup> From a host of intellectual perspectives and methodological assumptions, Burke is even today primarily read in the context of his intellectual contributions to political events in the second half of the eighteenth century. Given the chiefly eulogistic treatment of Burke as a "classic author" in the nineteenth century,<sup>58</sup> it is not surprising that treatments of his life and thought situated historically, in the context of his times, were few or neglected. However, with the increasing professionalization of historical writing, the corresponding drive to recover and analyze primary historical sources, and the increase in the publication of specialized monographs on many topics relevant to Burke's career, newer and more critical approaches to Burke emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. In this regard, Burke's reputation initially suffered an extreme pendulum swing away from perennial philosopher to the charge that he was a base political opportunist.

Beginning in 1929 with the writings of Sir Lewis Namier (1888-1960) and the numerous historians who followed him and acknowledged his influence, Burke was portrayed chiefly as a secondary political figure whose motives were determined by narrow partisan and personal interests. Namier's historical concerns originally were associated with the problem of empire during the American Revolution. He believed, however, that "the constitutional and political formulations of the problem were

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<sup>57</sup> Refers to the subtitle of Cone's book, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution* (1957), which is discussed below.

<sup>58</sup> The high tide of what Naomi Townsend has called the "idealistic and eulogistic" American image of Burke was 1897, the centenary of his death, when assessments of Burke were appearing in major American magazines and journals. Townsend, *Edmund Burke*, p. 78.



exceedingly simple, and the contemporary discussions of it very trite.”<sup>59</sup> And so he commenced the study of the “political structures” of the British nation through close reading and rigorous use of eighteenth-century documents. He analyzed the uses of power and the reasons for individual political behavior. As Harvey C. Mansfield put it, “The ‘Namier Method’ is the study of private records to divulge the private interests of eighteenth-century statesmen.”<sup>60</sup> Against the Whig and Victorian-era historians in England and America, Namier dismissed criticism of King George and the so-called double-cabinet system as a “legend which has its roots in...the literary afterthoughts of Edmund Burke....”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, he argued, “There never was a deliberate system of ‘double cabinets’ as sketched by Burke in a polemical pamphlet...but which has been often treated as if it were an impartial verdict on George III.”<sup>62</sup> Burke’s criticism of the King and successive ministries, Namier argued, “so beautifully elaborated by Burke’s fertile imagination that the Rockinghams themselves finished by believing it, and it grew into an obsession with them.”<sup>63</sup> And in a sketch of Burke’s “character,” Namier summarized his image of Burke as a thinker who “signally lacked detachment.... A poor observer, only in distant touch with reality, and apt to substitute for it figments of his own imagination, which grow and harden and finish by dominating both him and widening rings of men whom he influenced.” Burke was “self-righteous,” “hardly a reliable witness,” “a solitary, rootless man,” “a party politician with...a minority mind.” His political thought, for Namier, was “arrant nonsense written with much self-assurance.”<sup>64</sup> Namier and his followers, thus, called into question both his politics and his character. As Louis Bredvold put it, “Namier concluded that the real Burke is concealed behind the façade of his writings, but that historical research has now demonstrated that he was nothing more than an unprincipled political opportunist.”<sup>65</sup> This is a long way from Macaulay’s verdict that Burke was “the greatest man since Milton.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Sir Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, second edition, (London, 1929 and 1957), Preface, p. xi.

<sup>60</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield, “Sir Lewis Namier Considered,” *The Journal of British Studies*, 1965, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> Namier, *The Structure of Politics*, p. 238.

<sup>62</sup> Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution*, second edition, (London, 1930, 1961), p. 161.

<sup>63</sup> Namier, “King George III: A Study of Personality,” *Crossroads of Power* (New York, 1962), p. 127. See also Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, pp. xli-lix.

<sup>64</sup> Namier, “The Character of Burke,” *The Spectator*, December 19, 1958, pp. 895-896; quoted in Peter J. Stanlis, ed., *The Relevance of Edmund Burke* (New York, 1964), pp. 32-33.

<sup>65</sup> Louis I Bredvold, *The Relevance of Edmund Burke*, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas B. Macaulay, quoted in *Life and Letters*, II, by George O. Trevelyan (London, 1876), “Journal, February 6, 1854,” p. 318.

The influence of Namier's work at the time and in subsequent years owed largely to the mystique of the scientific method that he employed and its application to the study and interpretation of history. However, his attack on Whig history and its deterministic adherence to historical progress was expressed in an equally severe historical subjectivity that ironically is advanced by a fixation on rigorous methodological positivism and quantitative and sociological analysis. Such an emphasis served historians of the eighteenth-century well in shedding new and important light on the day-to-day workings of practical politics, highlighting as they did the contingency of historical events, chronicling the careers of notable politicians, examining the procedures of Parliamentary elections, and fostering a better understanding of voting patterns—all aspects of British political life that composed the “structure of politics” in Burke's age. And although Burke was not always viewed favorably in the principal scholarly investigations of British politics during the reign of George III in the generation after Namier,<sup>67</sup> there are notable exceptions. Lucy S. Sutherland (1903-1980), for one, maintained a “close academic relationship” with Namier but still portrayed Burke sympathetically in her writings, referring to him as “the ablest man of the eighteenth century.”<sup>68</sup> Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) ranks high on the list of anti-Namier commentators in this regard. Like Namier, he was a critic of the “Whig interpretation of history;” however, Butterfield cautioned in a long section on Namier in a book on the historiography of this period, that “the massiveness of detailed researches is not in itself sufficient to guarantee men from error in the work of historical reconstruction....”<sup>69</sup> He expressly defended the integrity of Burke's politics during this period: “Those of us who have been enemies of the Whig interpretation all our lives...will not necessarily follow a form of historiography which lacks the breadth to comprise the higher purposes of the Rockinghamites—an

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<sup>67</sup> Important studies at least sympathetic to the Namier's methodological assumptions and interpretations are John Brooke, *The Chatham Administration, 1766-1768* (London, 1956); Ian R. Christie, *The End of North's Ministry, 1780-1782* (London, 1958); J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, 1950); Charles R. Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (Norman, OK, 1955); J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III* (Oxford, 1960).

<sup>68</sup> *Statesmen, Scholars & Merchants*, Essays Presented to Dame Lucy Sutherland, edited by Anne Whiteman, J. S. Bromley, and P. G. M. Dickson (Oxford, 1973), p. xi. See also, Lucy S. Sutherland, “Edmund Burke and the First Rockingham Ministry,” *English Historical Review*, volume 47 (1932), pp. 45-71; *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics* (Oxford, 1952); “Edmund Burke and the Relations between Members of Parliament and Their Constituencies,” *Studies in Burke and His Time*, volume 10 (1968), pp. 1005-1021—this latter essay offering a particularly penetrating analysis of the background for Burke's first Bristol speech. See, too, her “Introduction” to *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke: Volume II, September 1768-June 1774* (Chicago, 1960).

<sup>69</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *George III and the Historians*, revised edition, (New York, 1959), pp. 200-201.

historiography which seems to reduce the programme of this party to a mere device of eighteenth-century faction.”<sup>70</sup> Butterfield refused to be imprisoned by either interpretations and thus represented another shift in considering Burke in relation to the politics of the 1760s and 1770s, one that resulted in a series of careful studies that plowed a scholarly middle ground between Whig and Namierite approaches.

To date, the two best book-length treatments of Burke’s relation to America occupy the scholarly *via media* that emerged during the late 1950s: Ross J. S. Hoffman’s *Edmund Burke, New York Agent* (1956) and Carl B. Cone’s (1916-1995) *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution* (1957). Both studies combined a critical appreciation of Burke’s ideas, his contributions and shortcomings, with a detached scholarly rigor and commitment to historical method that met the highest standards of the day.

Hoffman’s was the first work to attempt a full reconsideration of “the nature of [Burke’s] American politics.”<sup>71</sup> Of course, his point of departure and central interest lay in exploring Burke’s tenure as an American colonial agent. In May of 1771, Burke assumed the post of colonial New York agent in London. It was a position he held until the outbreak of hostilities that commenced the military phase of the American Revolution. From the late nineteenth through the twentieth century there were a number of treatments of the colonial agents in which Burke was considered.<sup>72</sup> Hoffman’s study, though, benefited from the discovery during the 1930s among the Fitzwilliam Papers of Burke’s folio-sized letter-book in which he kept drafts of his letters to the New York Assembly. With the interjection of this new source material Hoffman examined the circumstances and details of Burke’s activity in his role as colonial agent, including the negotiations that led to his appointment and acceptance, the politics of colonial New York through leading families such as the Delanceys, Crugers, and Livingstons, while at

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<sup>70</sup> Butterfield, *George III and the Historians*, p. 274.

<sup>71</sup> Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent*, p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> See Marguerite Appleton, “The Agents of the New England Colonies in the Revolutionary Period,” *New England Quarterly* 6, 1933, pp. 371-87; Charles Ritcheson, *British Politics and the American Revolution* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), p. 150ff, and Jack M. Sosin, *Agents and Merchants: British Colonial Policy and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965). The most recent study of colonial agents is Michael G. Kammen’s *A Rope of Sand: The Colonial Agents, British Politics, and the American Revolution* (New York, 1974). In most of these Burke merits only an occasional reference, usually one in a series of agents performing a specific colonial service or taking a position on behalf a colony’s interest. None consider Burke’s service within the context of his larger corpus of writings or political thought, which is Hoffman’s contribution.



the same time referencing Burke's activity as colonial agent to the complexity of British politics from the late 1760s to 1776. Burke's letters to the New York Assembly are generally dry business reports. From this ostensibly unexciting or uninteresting source Hoffman built a case for Burke's relative indifference to America except as a means to restore imperial harmony.

Hoffman's total neglect of Burke's pre-parliamentary writing on America impeded a more capacious treatment of Burke's image of America and the ways in which his politics as a member of the Rockingham party reflect or complicate his earlier views. For instance, Hoffman mentioned only in passing the *Settlements*, yet his study in particular aims to give a full account of Burke's relations to the colonies and to set that relationship in its proper historical and constitutional context.<sup>73</sup> Here as elsewhere, analysis of Burke's writing on colonial British America was restricted to the period between the Stamp Act and the American Revolution. This is regrettable, for, as has been argued, the *Settlements* is an indispensable early work for better appreciating the development of both the history and constitutional character of Burke's America and so cannot be easily passed over in any attempt to present Burke's image of America. Although Hoffman's study provided a focused analysis of Burke's activities in Parliament on behalf of the New York colonial assembly that accepted Burke's stated purposes and principles underlying his activities, Hoffman did not tell the full story. He neglected, for example, the larger perspective of the bases of these political activities and ideas that he might have developed had he engaged Burke's pre-parliamentary American writings.

Carl B. Cone's work is even more diffuse in this regard than Hoffman's. Cone's study was the first of two that presented a full, integrated biographical analysis of Burke's thought in the context of his day-to-day political career. The first volume commenced essentially with Burke's entry into politics as assistant to William Hamilton. Cone devoted little space to Burke's pre-political life; his biographical sketch is conventional, and only one chapter—"The Problem of Empire: The American Colonies"—deals specifically with his American writings, while the vast majority of the volume is concerned with Rockingham party affairs and British politics, detailing Burke's actions related to India, the East India Company, Ireland, and his party's

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<sup>73</sup> Hoffman, *Edmund Burke, New York Agent*, p. 23.

parliamentary struggles against Lord North's government through 1782. Cone's object was to show that throughout the "age of the American Revolution" Burke was chiefly a "party politician rather than a political philosopher." A discussion of Burke the philosopher is reserved for the second volume considering Burke's politics in "the age of the French Revolution." "Had Burke died before the French Revolution," Cone observed, "I doubt that we should think of him as a political philosopher."<sup>74</sup>

Cone, like Hoffman, was principally interested in Burke's America as a piece of the larger movement of British politics. One of those larger areas of Burke's thought is his understanding of empire. Out of his Irish and American experiences in particular, Burke developed an inclusive and federated view of empire that established the metropolitan center as (what would later be called) a kind of "trustee" watching over the various parts with the best interests of the whole in mind. Uniformity could not be imposed on an empire characterized by diversity of all kinds, geographical, racial, religious, etc. Peter J. Marshall (1933- ) and Anthony Pagden (1945- ) have in recent years probed the meaning of empire in Burke's thought.<sup>75</sup>

A number of specialized studies of British politics during the American revolutionary era pursued Carl Cone's objective of concentrating on Burke the politician in greater scholarly detail. A series of important works on the first Rockingham administration and on Rockingham himself, including studies by Ross Hoffman and Paul Langford, focused on the interests, policies, and principles of the Rockingham Party. Such studies concluded that while Rockingham and his party shared the same sentiment as the British nation, pressure to support the manufacturing interests in particular led them to qualify their views and advance the Declaratory Act as a compromise.<sup>76</sup> The

<sup>74</sup> Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution*, pp. vi-vii.

<sup>75</sup> See Peter Marshall's Introductions to the Oxford edition of *The Writing and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, volume V, "India, Madras and Bengal, 1774-1785" (1981), and volume VI, "The Launching of the Hastings Impeachment, 1786-1788" (1991); as well as "Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, volume XV, number 2 (January 1987), pp. 105-122. For Anthony Pagden see his *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven, 1993); *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995); and *Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest from Greece to the Present* (New York, 2003). See also recent works by Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), and Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

<sup>76</sup> Ross J. S. Hoffman, *The Marquis: A Study of Lord Rockingham, 1730-1782* (New York, 1973); Paul Langford, *The First Rockingham Administration, 1765-1766* (Oxford, 1973), and "The Rockingham Whigs and America, 1767-1773," in *Statesman, Scholars, and Merchants: Essays in Eighteenth-Century History Presented to Dame Lucy S. Sutherland* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 135-152. See also Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.,

Rockingham Party is presented in these studies as more dedicated to principle and less self-seeking than in Namier's own work. And so in that sense Burke fares better, too. Langford, though, like Namier, is interested in "dismantling" the Whig "myth of history" that he believes contributed "layer after layer of distortion and misrepresentation" onto the history of mid-eighteenth century Britain. To that end he was eager to prove that Rockingham—and Burke—were not quite the "far-seeing champions of American rights and liberties" that they are reputed to have been.<sup>77</sup> Rather, Burke is viewed as both a "rising star" and as the chief figure that "doubly distorted and misrepresented" the reality of the Rockingham administration through his "highly partisan effusions."<sup>78</sup>

The Namierite approach to history has produced its share of critics. Conor Cruise O'Brien deserves special notice in this regard, as he systematically challenged the Namierite interpretation of Burke in his 1992 thematic biography, *The Great Melody*. O'Brien directly challenged Namier's methodological assumptions, arguing that Namier overemphasized the role patronage and clientage played in eighteenth-century politics. For O'Brien, the Namier method ultimately gave an incomplete picture of the eighteenth-century political world in general, and the motivations and nature of Burke's politics in particular. By countering Namier's claims, O'Brien hoped to restore an appreciation for the central role that ideas and principles played in animating Burke theoretically and politically. For O'Brien, a deep interest in the Ireland and England of Burke's time, the Catholic and Protestant clash of culture and its familial implications for Burke, and the corresponding tension between his born "Irishness" and acquired "Britishness" are the interpretive keys.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, throughout the half-century that preceded the publication of O'Brien's study, Burke was considered principally in an English rather than Irish context.

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*Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago, 1965); Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs, 1760-1782* (London, 1975). Rockingham, it should be noted, emerges from these works, particularly in Hoffman's, as a more subtle, energetic, and high-minded leader than partisans of King George and his ministries have historically portrayed him.

<sup>77</sup> Langford, *The First Rockingham Administration*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>79</sup> In this regard, O'Brien differs from previous generations of Irish writers who viewed Burke, in S. J. Connolly's words, "as a metropolitan author whose concern with Ireland faded once he had moved to England." S. J. Connolly, ed, *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 11. This is R. B. McDowell's view. See especially in this regard, his "Burke and Ireland," in Dickson, Keogh, and Whelan, eds, *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 102-114. This essay summarizes McDowell's image of Burke that was first put forward in his *Irish Public Opinion, 1750-1800* (London, 1944).

Recent directions in Irish historical writing, however, are helping to recover the Irish background to Burke's thought.

Unfortunately, O'Brien's investigation of Burke's American "theme" begins with his election to Parliament, and he is rather uneasy about fitting Burke's American "pronouncements" into his larger image of Burke: "The metaphor of the Great Melody does not seem to fit so closely to Burke's speeches and writings on America...."<sup>80</sup> When it comes to America, O'Brien did not credit Burke with much of an appreciation for it or its cause until fighting breaks out and Burke's "emotions" are "strongly aroused" on behalf of the colonies. At the beginning of the crisis, he contended, Burke was "ambivalent."<sup>81</sup> So O'Brien was eager to move quickly to the years of Revolutionary drama. But that is to miss at least half of Burke's American story. And, ironically, it is the half that might have most interested O'Brien as it follows directly from Burke's personal and familial Irish history as well as his own reading of Ireland's national history, and it preceded his transition from a literary to a political career. Had O'Brien considered the place of Burke's *Account of the European Settlements in America* next to his other, earlier writing and journalism, the centrality of his Irishness to the American part of the great melody would have become clearer—and thus Burke's view of the colonies less ambivalent. Moreover, the Burke who would have emerged is in many ways the Burke that in other parts of his melody O'Brien is trying to recover. Burke the outsider, the product of a metropolitan periphery, the critic of imperial policy, the liberal reformer, the conservator of the British constitution, and the champion of tolerance and humane treatment of racial and religious "others" are all evident in Burke's pre-parliamentary writings and thus are the foundation for his Parliamentary speeches. As such, they help to complicate his later image as a mere reactionary defender of political and religious establishments. Even the role of Burke's experience of Irish Catholicism in fashioning his American speeches becomes clearer when at least equal weight is given to his earliest treatments of America and the experience of conquest and colonialism in the New World.

More generally, studies by J. C. D. Clark and H. T. Dickinson have also helped to revise the Namierite reading of the American revolutionary age and Burke's place in it by emphasizing the central importance of "political ideology." In Clark's revisionist studies

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<sup>80</sup> O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

on the “long” eighteenth century (1660-1832), religious beliefs and assumptions principally formed the discourse of the era, its “language of liberty,” and are thus at the heart of the dispute that led to the imperial crisis that was the American Revolution.<sup>82</sup> As noted above, Clark, like O’Brien, does not believe that Burke was strongly aroused on behalf of the colonies until hostilities broke out. However, he comes to this view through a centrally “English”—as opposed to “Irish”—reading of Burke. Clark contends that Burke was attached to the social structure of “English society”<sup>83</sup> that resembled European *ancien régimes* and was characterized by corporate privileges that organized English life top-down by a series of patronage links. Scholars influenced by Clark, such as S. J. Connolly, have extended this analysis to Ireland and argued that in the century following the Restoration, Ireland “is best seen as first and foremost a part of the European *ancien régime*.”<sup>84</sup> Burke as a young man in Ireland would have been aware of the continental European *ancien régime* through the many Irish Catholic links in France, Spain, and throughout the Holy Roman Empire. But it was the Anglican-Protestant caste that distinguished the established regimes in England and, by conquest, in Ireland; it was this regime that, according to Clark, Burke sought to defend throughout his writings. Burke is for Clark “English in Ireland.”<sup>85</sup> With regard to America, Clark relies almost solely on his *Speech on Conciliation* to argue that, while “Burke rightly observed, religion and law were the two dominant idioms in transatlantic discourse, they were not unrelated.”<sup>86</sup> His Anglican latitudinarianism and commitment to an older Whiggism obscured his ability fully to comprehend either the subversive implications of heterodox dissent to the body politic or the key role it played in the American revolt. For Clark, with the exception of the historical insights Burke had come to about the nature of the American character and his appreciation for the role religious discourse played in its formation, Burke’s writings

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<sup>82</sup> See especially his *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, 1994).

<sup>83</sup> See his work of this name, *English Society*, second revised edition (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>84</sup> S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford, 1992), p. 2. This is especially true when one thinks of the fact that in an important sense Ireland happened to be in the *ancien régime*—through its large numbers of Jacobite exiles. So the Irish association with the *ancien régime* was not primarily with Britain, but with France, and beyond that with Austria and Spain.

<sup>85</sup> See Clark, “Introduction,” Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford, CA, 2001), p. 25. This contemporary description is also accepted by R. B. McDowell in his writings, see especially in this regard, “Burke and Ireland,” in Dickson, Keogh, and Whelan, eds, *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 102-114; and Ross Hoffman in *Edmund Burke, New York Agent*, p. 73, where, we noted above, he describes Burke as a “thoroughly Briticized Irishman.”

<sup>86</sup> Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, p. 84.



about America essentially amount to a misunderstanding, or rather a partial understanding, about the temper of the time that he was not to comprehend fully until the outbreak of revolution in France.

Dickinson is more sympathetic toward Burke's view of America, but he also contends that his American proposals were ultimately lacking in that they never extended beyond his early advocacy of the Declaratory Act. Thus, Dickinson's Burke is a challenge to the contemporaneous image of him as a "friend of America," for, as Dickinson argues, while Burke was certainly friendly toward American complaints he was so only in a limited sense for he never came to accept colonial denial of the bounds of Parliamentary sovereignty.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Dickinson explicitly challenges the Namier method<sup>88</sup> and has contributed significantly to the reemergence of a literature that makes "the *connection* between political ideas and political behavior." In this regard he views Burke as "much the most sophisticated political thinker in the Rockingham ranks," one working within a Whig tradition devoted to "conservative notions of the ancient constitution rather than the more liberal ideas of John Locke...."<sup>89</sup> Dickinson thus moderates the position advanced by G. H. Gutteridge a generation earlier in his study *English Whiggism and the American Revolution*,<sup>90</sup> namely, that those in Parliament who opposed the Ministry's American policy did so based on expedience, not principle. Dickinson would agree that this was a large part of such conciliation proposals as Burke's, but that there was more ideological substance and historical empathy to Burke's anti-Ministerial critiques than mere political expediency. Although Dickinson does not himself probe Burke's pre-Parliamentary writings, by doing so one can better understand the complex nature and development of Burke's political ideas, their connection to his later political behavior, and their relation to the reception Burke received in the American

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<sup>87</sup> See Dickinson, "The Eighteenth-Century Debate on the Sovereignty of Parliament," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, volume 26 (1976), pp. 189-210; "Party, Principle and Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century Politics," *History*, volume 61 (1976), pp. 231-237; "Britain's Imperial Sovereignty: The Ideological Case against the American Colonists," in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (London, 1998), pp. 64-96; and see especially his "The Friends of America: British Sympathy with the American Revolution," in *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775-1848: Essays in Honour of Malcolm I. Thomis*, ed. Michael T. Davis (London, 2000), pp. 1-29.

<sup>88</sup> Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977), pp. 2-7.

<sup>89</sup> Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 10, 208.

<sup>90</sup> G. H. Gutteridge, *English Whiggism and the American Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1942).

colonies. Pursued in this way, Dickinson's ultimate judgment obtains even greater authority.

Dickinson's work provides a useful transnational bridge to the labors of recent American historians, and particularly to the new Atlantic historical approach championed by Bernard Bailyn. Indeed, Dickinson explicitly acknowledges his debt to Bailyn for influencing his "general approach."<sup>91</sup> While in Britain, Burke's image of America was largely reduced to the "business as usual" of Rockingham party politics; in America, historiography was moving toward a more capacious understanding of the complementary role ideas played in the structure of eighteenth-century political life. American historiography sought the middle ground between earlier generations of national and imperial historians, as well as their Namierite contemporaries, and cultivated that ground as part of a growing Atlantic history paradigm. The approach of Atlantic historians, thus, is helpful in framing colonial history as a properly transatlantic and thus trans-European subject.

With regard to the causes of the Revolution, Dickinson suggests that recent American historians have sought "to explain why the British colonists in North America reacted so swiftly, consistently and effectively to British policies which fell well short of oppressive measures that usually provoke a colonial people to rebellion." They have dug "below the surface of political events" to understand why relatively modest infringements ignited such a fierce war of words, constitutional wrangling, and ultimately a war for independence.<sup>92</sup> The Atlantic Ocean, thus, has connected British and American historians of the eighteenth century together in important ways. It has reminded historians on the American side that the discourse and events of that era were not driving inevitably to the formation of a "nation." And it has recalled British historians from a focus narrowly on internal British affairs and politics. It has challenged all historians of the age better to understand the ways in which those events and the characteristic "language" employed, to invoke the work of J. G. A. Pocock,<sup>93</sup> impacted non-participants, those outside colonial British America in Europe and elsewhere in the Americas, too. Burke's early American

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, in "Acknowledgements," n.p.

<sup>92</sup> Dickinson, *Britain and the American Revolution*, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Pocock, followed in important respects by J.C.D. Clark, has argued in a host of works that the mode or method of language and discourse shapes history. For this method applied to Burke see Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas," *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 202-232. See also in this regard James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London, 1963).

writing is suggestive precisely because it considers Americans both as a distinct people and as a people connected through shared language and “manners” to Britain.

The “Atlantic” emphasis in historical writing on the American side of the ocean commenced in the post-war period when, as Jack P. Greene believes, “the prevailing view of the Revolution came to be that it was predominantly a conservative Whiggish movement undertaken in defense of American liberty and property, preoccupied throughout with essentially political and constitutional questions.... The Revolution, in short, came to be seen primarily from the vantage point of the dominant Patriot elite which, with very few exceptions, had managed to maintain control of political life as well as the confidence of the public throughout the whole period from 1763-1789.”<sup>94</sup> It is easy to see how the popular understanding of Burke’s American writings could be interpreted in just this “neo-Whig” manner in the major survey works on American history in the mid- to late-twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> But in recent years, Bailyn, Gordon S. Wood (1933- ), and Pauline Maier (1938- ) among others have, in Greene’s words, “supplied the mortar for this new and, it has turned out, extraordinarily sturdy intellectual edifice...in their important studies of the ideological dimension of the Revolution.”<sup>96</sup> These writers demonstrated in their respective studies<sup>97</sup> the degree to which eighteenth-century colonial Americans drew upon transatlantic writers who were “distrustful of human nature” because “they thought that liberty was always in imminent danger of being corrupted by conspiracies of men who were unable to withstand the temptations of power.”<sup>98</sup>

Bailyn highlighted the drift toward radicalism implicit in the ideological development of the American patriots. His pupil Wood seized on this insight and contended that the progressive centrality of “new ages” and “new orders” of freedom

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<sup>94</sup> Jack P. Greene, “Beyond the Neo-Whig Paradigm,” in *Interpreting Early America: Historiographical Essays* (Charlottesville, VA, 1996), p. 444.

<sup>95</sup> See R. Alden, *The American Revolution: 1775-1783* (New York, 1954); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago, 1953); Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution, 1759-1766* (New York, 1960) and *Growth of the American Revolution: 1766-1775* (New York, 1975); Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic: 1763-89* (Chicago, 1956); Richard B. Morris, *The American Revolution: A Short History* (Princeton, 1955); and Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York, 1953).

<sup>96</sup> Jack P. Greene, “Beyond the Neo-Whig Paradigm,” p. 445.

<sup>97</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969) and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992); Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972 and 1991).

<sup>98</sup> Greene, “Beyond the Neo-Whig Paradigm,” p. 445.



rhetoric gave the Revolution a “socially radical character.”<sup>99</sup> In addition, Bailyn, Wood, and Meier each believed that Burke played a role in weakening colonial affection for, or advancing colonial disillusionment with, Britain through the colonists’ reading of his “conspiratorial” critique of King George and his “double-cabinet” with regard to America. This neo-Whig paradigm has been absorbed under the rubric of Atlantic history and supplemented by a pluralistic interest in “the annealing elements in an English Atlantic economic, political, and social community”—“a world joined not sundered by an intervening ocean.”<sup>100</sup> Put this way it is easier to see how the historical writing and corresponding historically-based politics of a “paleo” Whig such as Burke contributed to the “neo” Whig’s Atlantic history paradigm.

## II.

In addition to there being little scholarship on Burke’s understanding of America (that is, beyond discussions of the parliamentary context of his American politics), there is a surprising lacuna in Burke scholarship involving his philosophy of or thinking about history.<sup>101</sup> This is especially surprising given Burke’s well-formed historical consciousness and the centrality of it to his thought and subsequent politics. Through his youthful experiences in Ireland and in his early, pre-parliamentary writing on America, Burke fashioned an approach to history that allowed him to work out many concepts that would be fundamental to his later political thought: such as the relations between law and manners, economics and freedom, conquest and settlement, prescription and custom, reason and experience, degeneration and progress, limitation and unrestraint, development and revolution. In the decades before he stepped on to the political stage, Burke had already crafted an interpretation of history. He applied his historical views to his chronicling of the past and present in his early writing and in his founding role as editor of the *Annual Register*. His was a hermeneutic of reform, emphasizing the historical continuity of the Anglo-Atlantic world and the centrality of the British

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<sup>99</sup> Particularly in Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.

<sup>100</sup> Bailyn, “Idea of Atlantic History,” p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> Two dissertations in 1956 remain the best treatments of Burke’s historical thought. See Walter D. Love, “Edmund Burke’s Historical Thought,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1956; and John C. Weston, Jr., “Edmund Burke as Historian,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1956. Extended treatments of Burke’s historical thinking are included in David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), pp. 43-78; James Coniff, *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany, NY, 1994), pp. 53-84; and Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford, 1996) pp. 209-244.

Constitution, which had developed through prudent reform (as opposed to altering or radical change), and which, in turn, established and sustained the stability and liberty of the Anglo-American people. Moreover, Burke came of age during the Enlightenment. America played a key role in late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment works. And Burke came to draw on many of the critical methods and historiographic trends of other acknowledged Enlightenment historians, such as Montesquieu, Hume, and Robertson. So the question of Burke's place in the Enlightenment, the nature of his relation to Enlightenment thought, is of fundamental importance to how he approached the study of America and in what ways and with what reference points he fashioned his image of it.

While still a youth, Burke became convinced that he was living in a relatively civilized age in both the material and intellectual sense: "these enlightned times (sic)" as he described it to Shackleton.<sup>102</sup> Although, as will be discussed in the next chapter, Burke did not regard the poverty-stricken rural Catholic Ireland of his boyhood as highly civilized, in itself or in what was done to it (the latter even more than the former). He was, though, convinced that the age in which he lived had many educational advantages. Thirty years after his note to Shackleton, Burke wrote to William Robertson, "I have always thought with you that we possess at this time very great advantages towards the knowledge of human Nature."<sup>103</sup>

Burke does not, to be sure, fit neatly into any preconceived Enlightenment context. Yet, his developing thought can be situated broadly within the history of Enlightenment thought. Indeed, scholars today appreciate the degree to which there was not one, but many different "Enlightenments" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which has contributed to the proliferation of Enlightenment studies). Although some categories are shared, the national Enlightenments in Scotland, England, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, and, increasingly, Ireland, point to an Enlightenment

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<sup>102</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 21 March, 1746/47, *Correspondence*, I, p. 89. In the *Tracts Relating to the Popery Laws*, Burke contended that "in proportion as mankind had become enlightened" past social injustices such as religious persecution "have been almost universally exploded by good and thinking men." *WS*, IX, p. 465. J.G.A. Pocock contends that it was just such a formulation that characterized the narratives of Enlightenment by the age's leading figures. See, Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The Anti-Self of Enlightenment," *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (Huntington Library, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>103</sup> Burke to Robertson, 9 June 1777, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 350-352.

age that was pluralist rather than uniform, and generally more favorable to a religious than to a secular based worldview.<sup>104</sup>

J. G. A. Pocock has argued that Burke was “an Enlightened figure, who saw himself defending Enlightened Europe against the *gens de lettres* and their revolutionary successors...[his was] one kind of Enlightenment in conflict with another.”<sup>105</sup> Burke was obviously no Voltaire or Condorcet, still less a Rousseau or Tom Paine. But there is nonetheless a decidedly intellectual kinship between Burke and Montesquieu, William Robertson, Adam Smith, and Benjamin Franklin—each canonized as Enlightenment figures. The complexity of Burke’s thought and experience, then, suggests a place for him within another, more conservative Enlightenment. A question is thus raised that Pocock left unanswered: what “kind of Enlightenment” does Burke belong to?

Burke’s positive engagement with the Enlightenment has not always been readily granted.<sup>106</sup> Many Burke interpreters have read him in a counter-Enlightenment context, that is, as a reactionary or romantic traditionalist.<sup>107</sup> This is usually based on a reading of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that emphasizes it as the summary statement of his thought. And there are, of course, several ways in which Burke cut across the grain of the French tradition of Enlightenment thought: for instance, in his positive regard for religion and established churches, his support of a hereditary aristocracy, his disposition to preserve existing social structures, his rejection of abstract reason in favor of the

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<sup>104</sup> The existence of an Enlightenment in Ireland has not been so much a matter of scholarly controversy as neglect. This is changing: see Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*; Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke, Field Day Essays*, number 15 (Notre Dame, IN, 2005); and Sean Patrick Donlan, “Law and Lawyers in Edmund Burke’s Scottish Enlightenment,” *Studies in Burke and His Time*, volume 20 number 1, 2005, pp. 38-67. See also, “Enlightenment,” S. J. Connolly, ed., *The Irish Companion to Irish History*, new edition (Oxford, 2002), pp. 185-186.

<sup>105</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume One: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 7. Gertrude Himmelfarb echoed Pocock’s interpretation in *The Roads to Modernity* (New York, 2004), pp. 71-92.

<sup>106</sup> An exception is C. P. Courtney’s, “Edmund Burke and the Enlightenment,” in Whiteman, Bromley, and Dickson, ed., *Statesmen, Scholars, and Merchants*, pp. 304-323.

<sup>107</sup> Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1957), p. 161, and his *The Enlightenment and Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991). See also Isaiah Berlin, who presented Burke as the font of a Counter Enlightenment, “The Counter Enlightenment,” in Philip P. Weiner, ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1973), volume II, pp. 100-112; *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London, 1990); *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York, 2000), *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton, 2001), and *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, second edition (Oxford, 2002). More recently see Graeme Garrard, *Counter Enlightenment: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London, 2006). For an example of this characterization in an Irish context see David Berman, “Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in Irish Philosophy,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, volume 64, 1982, pp. 4-26, and “The Irish Counter Enlightenment,” in Richard Kearney, ed., *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin, 1985), pp. 119-140.

guidance of experience, custom, and tradition. It is here that we enter into the murky waters of various and differing “enlightenments.” “The” Enlightenment is no longer thought to be a loosely connected but coherent movement of individuals and ideas. One impressive exception to this trend that restates the unitary Enlightenment thesis is Jonathan Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*, in which he acknowledges recent historiographic trends but nevertheless conveys “a sense of the European Enlightenment as a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement....”<sup>108</sup> With the exception of one passing and unrelated mention, Burke is absent from the pages of this hefty treatise. At the very least, whether the Enlightenment is considered as a uniform intellectual and international movement or as a series of national Enlightenment families, it is argued here that Edmund Burke is part of the larger Enlightenment story.

However, it is now generally recognized that the Enlightenment was not as universal as it was once portrayed, but rather took on a decidedly particular or national dimension.<sup>109</sup> The secular and “universal” “project” that used to be generally advanced in scholarly literature as “The” Enlightenment now refers to a particular manifestation of Enlightenment thinking, which was located predominately in France. The new emphasis on “Enlightenments” in the context of diverse national experiences has led scholars to ask more readily such questions as “Which Enlightenment Project?”<sup>110</sup>

If there had been general agreement in previous generations about what fundamentally constituted the Enlightenment project it would be the emphasis on the faculty of reason, the central place given to the new experimental science, the application of the scientific method to society, and the concomitant assault on the religious interpretation of man and society—or as Peter Gay put it starkly, the Enlightenment was “a declaration of war on Christianity.”<sup>111</sup> The Christian religion was “an insidious force” that had benefited from the decay of Rome and “began to insinuate itself into the mentality” of the late Romans. The arrival of Christianity represented “the retreat from

<sup>108</sup> Jonathan I. Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001), p. v.

<sup>109</sup> Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981); Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Ideas in Context, number 41 (New York, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> James Schmidt, “What Enlightenment Project?” *Political Theory*, vol. 29, no. 6, (December 2000), pp. 734-757.

<sup>111</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1966), p. 203.

reason.”<sup>112</sup> Not surprisingly, Gay took a dim view of Burke, as did Roy Porter after him.<sup>113</sup> The scholarship of Gay, Porter, and like-minded historians did much to create an image of a monolithic Enlightenment. “Science” in this interpretation was not pure, but applied, and not merely to nature but to man, in an effort to discover a science of society. For Gay, the bold, self-reliant figures of the Enlightenment aimed to sweep away Christianity, and by extension the institutions, mores, and traditions that had developed from the Christian cult and that formed the orthodoxy of European culture until the mid-eighteenth century. To this end the Enlightenment more generally is characterized as a movement of criticism; that it was, according to Louis Dupré, “first and foremost a breakthrough in critical consciousness.”<sup>114</sup> From Voltaire and Hume to Diderot and Kant, such negative formulations were viewed as animated by a positive ideal: the rational autonomy of the individual or self-rule by reason.<sup>115</sup> Enlightenment figures in different nations were portrayed as loosening the ties of dogma and tradition.

Recent scholarship, however, demonstrates that the place of religion, particularly the Christian religion, in the Enlightenment era is more complex and interesting than Gay’s reduction. In the new *Cambridge History of Christianity*, Helena Rosenblatt argues that for the most part the Enlightenment “took place *within* the Christian churches themselves.” She points to the dominance of Protestantism in Germany’s Enlightenment and the role of such figures as William Robertson—historian, Presbyterian pastor, ecclesiastical statesman, and principal of Edinburgh University—as evidence that in many national contexts, “the Enlightenment was more about reinvigorating and

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>113</sup> See, *Ibid.*, p. 374, and Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (New York, 1969), pp. 3-5-306; See also Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York, 2000), and *The Enlightenment*, second edition (New York, 2001), p. 70. In America, Henry May generally situated Burke in opposition to the Enlightenment by virtue of his opposition to the French Revolution. See *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976), pp. 252-253. Similarly, Henry Steele Commager argued that Burke’s later works “signalized the end of the Enlightenment in the Old World, for a long time, but not in the New.” See *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment* (New York, 1978). Other scholars have been more subtle and less dismissive of religion, and consequently of Burke, but have nevertheless emphasized the general tendency toward a secularized worldview. See Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT, 1932); Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century from Montesquieu to Lessing* (New Haven, CT, 1954); and Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ, 1968).

<sup>114</sup> Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, 2004), p. xiii.

<sup>115</sup> For an extended analysis of this positive Enlightenment ideal see Christopher O. Blum, “‘Where Is the Wisdom We Have Lost in Knowledge?’: The Cultural Tragedy of the Enlightenment,” *The Downside Review*, volume 125, number 438, January 2007, pp. 51-66.



redefining religion than destroying it.”<sup>116</sup> A large and influential number of Protestants and Catholics, she contends, shared a commitment to similar beliefs and used similar language in attempting to reconcile faith and the new sciences, religious toleration and respect for cultural and religious diversity. They were concerned as much about fanaticism or “enthusiasm” as were their secular counterparts but they also worried about the effects of irreligion, and generally sought balance and “reasonableness” in all aspects of civil social life, including religion. Such persons believed “they could be religious and enlightened at the same time.” Enlightened Christians, then, were combating the onset of subjectivist religiosity, the rise of materialistic and individualistic deism, and a seemingly intractable or ossified orthodoxy within institutionalized Christianity.<sup>117</sup> Each of these challenges was a principal concern of Christian intellectuals seeking to renew and reinvigorate the foundations of their faith.

The question Pocock left unanswered as to the kind of Enlightenment Burke came to inhabit receives its reply in this “Christian Enlightenment.” The Enlightenment is a term that now necessitates such qualification, much the same way in which the term “Humanism” needed “Christian” prefixed to it once the many facets and assumptions of Renaissance Humanism became more apparent during the last century. Furthermore, such qualification serves to highlight a crucial tension in this thesis and in the current state of eighteenth-century scholarship more generally, namely, the existence of so many “Enlightenments.” The fact that scholars now regularly refer to the Enlightenment in terms alternatively Universal, National, Reason-centered, Sentiment-based, Civic, Commercial, Imperial, Anti-Imperial, Athesitic, Christian, etc., actually calls into

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<sup>116</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, “The Christian Enlightenment,” *Cambridge History of Christianity*, Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett, editors (Cambridge, 2006), p. 283. In this regard, Rosenblatt might have also included John Witherspoon and the nature of his contribution to the American Enlightenment. See Jeffry H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, IN, 2005). For confirmation and development of Rosenblatt’s larger thesis see also, B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Cambridge, 1998), and James Bradley and Dale Van Kley, editors, *Religion and Politics in Enlightened Europe* (Erasmus Institute, Notre Dame, IN, 2001). For Burke’s positive relationship to Christianity, see F. P. Lock, “Burke and Religion,” in *An Imaginative Whig*, Ian Crowe, ed., pp. 19-36.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284ff. Lester G. Crocker’s work supports this point. He argued that in other countries there were “many who were not *philosophes* and frequently did not share their intense, at times fanatical attitude toward religion, [who] contributed to new modes of thought in every domain. The fact that Enlightenment was essentially, though by no means entirely anti-Christian in France does not mean that it had to be, or that it was so in other countries.... The identification of ‘Enlightenment’ with *philosophes*, even if we limit it to France, therefore breaks down at every point.” Crocker, “The Enlightenment: What and Who?” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, volume 17, 1987, p. 340. See also Crocker’s *An Age of Crisis: Man and World in Eighteenth Century French Thought* (Baltimore, 1959), pp. 3-71.

question the usefulness of “Enlightenment” as a category, whether as seen as movement manifesting itself in particular national cultures or as a universal philosophical project or as some combination perhaps related, perhaps not. The Enlightenment, after all, like the Renaissance, is a nineteenth-century creation. In both periods, some writers and thinkers certainly believed they were involved in a new “project” that necessitated breaks with old ways of thinking; but many others were also engaging the same social and theoretical problems, using the same new and old critical tools, only doing so in a spirit of conservation, of engaging the continuity of history which had presented them with particular problems to grapple with and interpret at a particular moment in time. That is, some figures saw themselves as innovators, some simply saw themselves as reformers. In that regard, a Rabelais might have recognized a Condorcet, a Machiavelli<sup>118</sup> a Voltaire, or a Sir Thomas More a Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke. Hence, while “Enlightenment” as a term or concept or description is deeply sunk into the contemporary scholarly mind, signs point to its weakening hold and qualified usefulness in capturing an extremely diverse and intellectually plural period of revolution and reform. In the pages of this thesis, the complexity of and tensions in Edmund Burke’s writings can be seen as providing a case study in the current limitations of the term “Enlightenment.”<sup>119</sup>

Still, of the available categories of Enlightenment, Burke would certainly belong to the Christian Enlightenment. And he does because he was connected more deeply through his education to Europe’s Christian humanistic tradition. It will be demonstrated that Burke’s American history, oratory, aesthetics, and politics are particular manifestations of an Enlightened religious humanism: or what one might even more precisely describe as an Enlightened Anglo-Irish religious humanism. Indeed, from an early age Burke inherited from the Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance humanists he read—Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Cicero, More, Erasmus, and Bacon to name only a few—a commitment to the *artes liberales* or *studia humanitatis* tradition, with its emphasis on human refinement, moral instruction of the good citizen, and, ultimately, the

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<sup>118</sup> For a discussion of Burke as an “Anti-Machiavel” see Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Suspecting Glance* (London, 1972), pp. 33-50.

<sup>119</sup> J.C.D. Clark seems to hold the same view of the limits of “Enlightenment” and the ways in which Burke’s life and thought highlight such a limitation. See his “Critical Edition” of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford, CA, 2001), p. 108. For a more general view of the limits of Enlightenment as a term of distinction, see Sankar Muthu, an advocate of “Enlightenment anti-imperialism,” *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), pp. 265-266.

cultivation of intelligence, conscience, and grace.<sup>120</sup> Just what kind of Christian Burke was is beyond the scope of this thesis. Despite his close and deep attachment to his Roman Catholic kin and the native Irish gentry of which they were a part, there is no evidence that Burke was a Roman Catholic, crypto or otherwise. Still, his formative years were spent intimately within the familial context of that faith and the culture it incarnated in his native Ireland. One might certainly argue that he had a Catholic mind or imagination.<sup>121</sup> Most Burke scholars now contend that, although he did in fact have a Catholic sensibility, he was an orthodox and practicing Anglican with theologically latitudinarian leanings.<sup>122</sup> Burke was a genuine and practicing Christian. And he believed from an early age that one of the great tragedies of modern civilization was the dissolution of Christian unity: “Far be it from me to exclude from Salvation such as believe not as I do, but indeed it is a melancholy thing to consider the Diversities of Sects and opinions amongst us, Men should not for <sm>all matters commit so great a Crime as breaking the unity of the Church....”<sup>123</sup> As such, he drew upon and attempted to live according to the historic deposit of Church teaching. Christian ethics, the idea of the gentleman, the ethical legislator, and the classical/Christian humanist image of man and his place or purpose in the world combined in him and helped forge his mind. Poetry, history, grammar, rhetoric, and, to a generally unacknowledged degree, the new experimental science, were the vehicles that shaped his imagination. All of which necessarily qualifies one’s understanding of Burke’s place in his “enlightened times.”

Humanism or humanist are, like Enlightenment, a label that suffers from being overly general. It is therefore necessary to state what is meant when they are invoked. Fundamentally, Burke’s politics were literary, poetical, moral, and historical. Through his mastery of various disciplines he came to appreciate that there are other modes of knowledge at least as instructive as reason. The humanism referred to in this thesis and which Burke renewed in his time and in the new Enlightened context is the belief that art, writing, and speaking (aesthetics and rhetoric) had a social and a moral dimension or responsibility; the contention that rhetoric and philosophy must not be separated; the

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<sup>120</sup> See Gerald G. Walsh, *Medieval Humanism* (New York, 1942), p. 80; Robert R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 305; Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York, 1995), pp. 75-113.

<sup>121</sup> Which Conor Cruise O’Brien importantly did in *The Great Melody*.

<sup>122</sup> In this regard see Lock, “Burke and Religion,” *op. cit.*; and J.C.D. Clark, ed., Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 25-30, 87-98.

<sup>123</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 15 October 1744, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 32-33.

conviction that an individual had a duty to serve the public good; and the understanding that there must exist always a balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of what the ancients called wisdom and the Enlightenment termed reason. Humanists were rhetoricians first; they believed in the ongoing power of words and ideas, and they saw in deliberation and debate a better means than coercion to resolve conflict. If they were contemplative, they were also active. The humanist was the integrated philosopher in action. There is no better description of Edmund Burke.

Many of the current studies on the Enlightenment, as Helena Rosenblatt noted<sup>124</sup>, have focused on the passions and the sentiments, and in this regard take a positive view of Rousseau. Some see Burke's essay on the *Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) as a key text in this aspect of the Enlightenment.<sup>125</sup> For all Burke's criticisms of Rousseau,<sup>126</sup> both were representatives of a common vein running through the eighteenth century: the current of sensibility as opposed to the movement of rationality. Indeed, Rosenblatt argues, the eighteenth century "was not just the Age of Reason; it was also the Age of Sentiment." Burke's Christian humanism distanced him from the rationalism of the deists, atheists, or, increasingly, of the religious enthusiasts in his age and attuned him to the language and psychology of sentiments. Like other Enlightened Christians, he understood that a political language that went beyond reason was called for, and so instead drew largely upon the vocabulary of sentiments. As Rosenblatt puts it, "Broadly speaking, if Enlightened Christians sounded much like Locke in the early part of the [eighteenth] century, they sounded more like Rousseau towards the end."

As will be discussed in chapter two, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke engaged the writings of Locke as well as of Longinus and Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) to form a highly original contribution to the Age of Sentiment. The similarities and dissimilarities between Rousseau and Burke have been the subject of book length considerations.<sup>127</sup> Burke had read Rousseau no later than 1759, and in 1762 wrote a critical review of Rousseau's ideas about education and sentiments expressed in

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<sup>124</sup> Rosenblatt, "The Christian Enlightenment," pp. 292-297.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Ernst Cassirer's treatment of Burke's aesthetics in *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, pp. 328-331.

<sup>126</sup> Burke seems intrinsically hostile to Rousseau; see the many heated criticisms Burke makes of him in the *Reflections*, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, and *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, WS, IX.

<sup>127</sup> Annie Marion Osborn, *Rousseau and Burke: A Study of the Idea of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Oxford, 1940); and David Cameron, *The Social Thought of Rousseau and Burke: A Comparative Study* (Toronto, 1973).

*Emile*.<sup>128</sup> Burke repeatedly denounced Rousseau as an “insane *Socrates*,”<sup>129</sup> a false prophet leading the Christian commonwealth of Europe to the brink of disaster. However, even in his most vehement anti-Rousseau moments many of Burke’s fundamental premises appear strikingly Rousseauian. And some have traced the origins of political romanticism in the nineteenth century back to the writings of both Burke and Rousseau.<sup>130</sup> Both rejected the totalist claims of abstract rationalism; both frequently appealed to nature and to God its Author; both did not countenance an exceptionalist glorification of the present; neither wanted to return to the past so much as preserve and enliven what they thought were the advantages of the customs and manners of ages preceding their own; both believed in the ultimate wisdom of peoples over time; and in this regard, both saw the state as a means to man’s and society’s conservation. Yet, between these generalities and their actual social thought, circumstance and experience forged a wide gulf. Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* is the chief work connecting these two figures. Throughout his American writings, Burke was to apply his theory of the sentiments, his political aesthetic, with great historical and oratorical skill.

Given the place of Burke’s treatise on aesthetics in the history of philosophy, not to mention that it is central to understanding Burke’s politics, it is somewhat surprising that Rosenblatt does not include him (or Adam Smith, author in 1759 of *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* which Burke reviewed favorably) in her brief survey of Christian figures in the “Age of Sentiment.”<sup>131</sup> Among other benefits of seeing Burke in this light is that it would demonstrate that, as was true in the Age of Reason, the Age of Sentiment was not monolithic. And while the thought of Burke and Rousseau might be usefully compared, their elemental differences are at least as revealing as their affinities; for unlike Rousseau, Burke’s sentiments were not sentimental, they had to have a basis in reality. For a thinker such as Rousseau, form meant restraint; whereas for Burke, form equaled freedom. Burke was a strong proponent of the connection between art and nature, poetry and morality; and because of this, he would not release the emotive power without a frame of reference: usually some combination of custom and reason. In this sense, one might make room in Rosenblatt’s typology of Christian Enlightenment for such thinkers

<sup>128</sup> See his review of Rousseau’s “Letter to M. d’Alembert” in *The Annual Register* 1759, as well as his review of *Emile* in *The Annual Register* 1762.

<sup>129</sup> In *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), *WS*, IX, p. 314.

<sup>130</sup> See Alfred Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State* (New York), pp. 158-164.

<sup>131</sup> Helena Rosenblatt, “The Christian Enlightenment,” p. 293.



as Burke who occupy a kind of “School of the Unsentimental Sentiment,” intuitively seeking to tether ideas and beliefs to the ultimate nature of reality.

This distinction between Burke and Rousseau is also the basis for the distinctiveness of Burke’s later politics. As will be discussed in chapter three, from an early age Burke observed the operations of actors in history, as well as the impact of nature on individuals and history. In the years before his entry on the political stage, his studies and writings became increasingly more historical and “scientific”: historical in the sense of considering history as a record of the actions and thoughts of real people, and scientific by implication of seeing in the inductive investigation of the natural world the best way to understand reality itself. In this way Burke and others like him tried to fashion a science of human life. The twentieth-century English writer G. K. Chesterton once reflected, “All my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made.”<sup>132</sup> Like Chesterton after him, Burke was just such a realistic moralist. He famously rejected system-making and he did not succumb to the temptation of offering a system projected from within upon an outside world that he had not made. Rather, he studied comprehensively, comparatively, and proposed reforms to fit the contours of a world not of his making.

As with most eighteenth-century thinkers, the humanities and sciences formed a unity in Burke’s mind. He studied both as a young writer in order better to obtain a holistic view of the person acting in society. Precisely because Burke was a humanist and not a theological or philosophical metaphysician he drew upon a wide range of intellectual resources in what today we might call an interdisciplinary approach. “I have ever thought,” Burke wrote to Adam Smith after reading the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “that the old Systems of morality were too contracted and that this Science could never stand well upon any narrower Basis than the whole of Human Nature.”<sup>133</sup> In this and other places, one can see Burke engaging what Ernest Cassirer called the Enlightenment’s “systemic spirit” (as opposed to a “spirit of systems”): that is, “Philosophy...no longer...separated from science, history, jurisprudence, and politics;...no longer the isolated substance of the intellect....”<sup>134</sup> In so doing he approached the advocacy of something close to what Montesquieu called the *esprit*

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<sup>132</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “Wonder and the Wooden Post,” in *The Coloured Lands* (New York, 1938), p. 157.

<sup>133</sup> Burke to Smith, 10 September 1759, *Correspondence*, I, p. 129.

<sup>134</sup> Ernest Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, p. vii.

*général* in his sensitivity toward physical, legal, historical, and moral factors that he believed combine to forge a people. As such, he believed he could turn his lens with greater accuracy on the past for the benefit of contemporary instruction and use. Burke worked inductively from particular crises, actions, or policies back to what was more largely at issue, i.e. human nature, culture, civilization. It was this facility for moving between studying parts and wholes that accounts for Burke's reputation as a creative conservator.

Burke's historical sense was characterized by its attraction to reconciling fundamental causes with manifestations of particular historical events. As J.G.A Pocock has argued, "Humanist attitudes toward the problem of universals were various and exceedingly complex...."<sup>135</sup> And so a key to understanding Burke's thought and his place within the humanist continuum during the Enlightenment period is to recognize his attitude toward the problem of reconciling universalist and particularist claims. Pocock has considered at great length the meaning and implications of a tradition of political consciousness he termed "civic humanism." He referred to the work of Jerrold Siegel to argue that humanists pursued the *vita activa* or the active life.<sup>136</sup> The humanists "were by their social function affiliated with the art of rhetoric," which was in Renaissance Italy and later in eighteenth-century Atlantic political culture "an intellectual pursuit fully as important...as philosophy and always seen in the sharpest contrast with it." Philosophy, Pocock pointed out, was generally speaking a non-political and contemplative concern for "the knowledge of universals and the understanding of particulars in their light." Rhetoric, on the other hand, was aimed at demonstration and persuasion and movement. It was "intellect in action in society.... Political by its nature, it was invariably and necessarily immersed in particular situations, particular decisions, and particular relationships...." As language was the key to communication, philology was preferred to philosophy, prose to poetry. Humanists were keen to understand or perceive the grammar of particular situations. The classical authors they read spoke not through universal structures, but across time in the concrete circumstances in which the author's thought was conceived and articulated. This gave rise to early modern historical consciousness, to

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<sup>135</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975; second paperback edition, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58; for Siegel see, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: the Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton, NJ, 1968)

an incipient historicism, as well as to a deeper awareness of the ways in which prose writing had a directly social purpose. As Pocock put it, “A certain affinity between philological and political humanism” began to appear as “the humanist rhetoricians were converting the intellectual life into a conversation between men in time.”<sup>137</sup>

The Enlightenment in previous generations was often referred to as a universal movement espousing universalist moral and political principles, whereas, as has been noted, scholars today tend to emphasize the ways in which it was historicist, with some thinkers being interested in particular and diverse manifestations of a shared humanity across cultures and nations or some countries evidencing in their “Enlightenment” this particularist pattern. Burke is an especially intriguing figure in that he evidences both tendencies in his thought. He believed in the existence of a universal human nature that led to the formation of “principles of judgment as well as of sentiment common to all mankind”; and he also believed that “art is Man’s nature,” and, hence, that man will construct and develop and reason towards sometimes very different moral practices and social institutions than emerged in Europe but were nevertheless intrinsically worthy.<sup>138</sup> For Burke, there are qualities about human nature and culture that are held in common and those that are diverse. He expressed this tension in one of his famous passages in the *Reflections*, wherein he noted that to “be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ, as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love of country and to mankind....”<sup>139</sup>

As will be demonstrated in the pages of this thesis, the facility to think in this way was the font of Burke’s ability to recognize existing political societies on their own terms. His intent was not to curb distinctiveness, but to reform in order to preserve the

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-63. Consistent with Pocock’s characterization of the civic humanist orientation, Burke’s own intellectual restlessness inclined him more in the direction of the active as opposed to the speculative life. However, his intense intellectualism left a marked tension between his active nature and the contemplative aspirations that he would reveal in 1777 to Glasgow University Professor William Richardson and Edinburgh University Principal William Robertson in letters dated merely nine days apart. Burke admitted to both scholars that “contemplative virtue” is greater than “active virtue” especially in that the former (“the solid wealth”) transcends the ephemera and compromises that define the latter. Still, he held that even the independent contemplative life was meant to be for some useful societal end or purpose. Burke to William Richardson, 18 June 1777, *Correspondence*, III, p. 355; and to William Robertson, 9 June 1777, *ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>138</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, p. 196; *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, Works, volume IV, p. 176.

<sup>139</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, pp. 97-98.

informing spirit of peoples, cultures, and their institutions. He believed in a universal or natural moral law, but he did not adhere to a universality separated from history. Rather Burke's moral realism was based upon his understanding that at the most fundamental level of existence, people shared a common human nature, and thus a common human ground. Of significance to Burke's thought, and the subject of chapters three, four, and five, was his ability to derive from his belief in a shared humanity an understanding that a common human nature simultaneously affirms the essential value of diversity—that is, particularity often manifests universality. In this regard, Burke's Enlightened humanism will be discussed with reference to what will be called his “value-centered historicism.”<sup>140</sup> Burke's engagement with Enlightenment thought and historical inquiry within the longer tradition of religious Humanism was a key source of his intellectual creativity and moral imagination.<sup>141</sup>

One example of how Burke worked this out theoretically was in the important distinction he made between change and reform. The former, he argued, destroys or substantially alters established institutions and norms, “alters the substance of the objects themselves, and gets rid of all their essential good as well as of the accidental evil annexed to them.” Reform, by contrast, makes necessary and prudent changes to improve and preserve the fundamental institutions and prescriptive norms of society. “Reform is not change in the substance or in the primary modification of the object,” Burke contended, “but a direct application of a remedy to the grievance complained of.”<sup>142</sup> The remedies for social grievances are the product of a critical, creative, and, one might even say, Enlightened engagement with the past that when brought to bear in the present is tempered by prudence and a spirit of caution and gradualism so as not to destroy the “essential good” along with the “accidental evil.” Burke's Enlightened reformism thus embraced change and development but with the reference point being the past, not the future (hence the traditionalist component of “his Enlightenment”). Unlike such Enlightenment thinkers as Condorcet or Voltaire, who theorized about an ideal future and

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<sup>140</sup> A term used by the political theorist Claes Ryn in discussing the work of the American critic and “New Humanist,” Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). See *Will, Imagination and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem of Reality* (Washington, DC, 1986); and *A Common Human Ground: Universality and Particularity in the Multicultural World* (Columbia, Missouri, 2003), especially pp. 79-98. Chapter seven of this thesis contains a brief discussion of Burke's influence on Babbitt.

<sup>141</sup> It is worth stressing here that at his most basic, Burke had to accept as inherently virtuous both of the Catholic and Protestant Episcopalian religions, whose mutual loathing dictated the socio-political contours of his native Ireland.

<sup>142</sup> Burke, *A Letter to a Noble Lord, Works*, V, p. 186.

viewed the past and present through the prism of their own utopia,<sup>143</sup> Burke rejected change based on abstract theorizing, “novelty,” and the “spirit of innovation.”<sup>144</sup> For Burke, to preserve it was necessary to reform.

Burke was, then, always a committed *reformer*. Not a revolutionary one such as many of the *philosophes*; rather, he was, instead, an evolutionary reformer intent on charting the development of mankind in political society for contemporary instruction and use. (Appropriately, as will be discussed in the following chapter, Burke chose to call his college newspaper, *The Reformer*). Later, as a legislator, he sought reforms that were “healing and mediatorial,”<sup>145</sup> measures he believed were most likely to be based on history and experience. In all of his efforts and works, Burke employed many of the new critical methods and outlooks of his time, fashioning his own distinctive place as a reformer within the Age of Enlightenment.

### III.

Suggestively, Burke’s formative years straddled two ages: the older world of Christendom and the newer “enlightened” epoch of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The content of his education and his commitment to the claims of religion and religious authority as a necessary and salutary social dynamic connected him to a tradition of inquiry that bridged the classical-medieval-modern divide. In this his historical sense and historiography were closer to the Scot William Robertson, than the Scot David Hume, to the Frenchman Montesquieu than the Frenchman Voltaire. Of course, inevitably, Burke was also affected if not entirely shaped by the spirit of his own age; in this case characterized by the broad application of scientific rationality, a corresponding propensity for system building, the delimitation of authority—ecclesiastical, political, and supernatural—and an abstract emphasis on grand ideas such as liberty and equality along with a drive to homogenize societies in accordance with these universals.

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<sup>143</sup> Carl Becker makes this point clearly with reference to the *philosophes*’ historical writing, which was generally conceived “not in order to trace the evolution of events or to explain them in terms of their origins and effects, but in order to apply to events the ‘idea of the just and the unjust,’ in order to apply to them the ready-made judgments of the age of reason.” *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p. 109.

<sup>144</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, XIII, pp. 84, 181.

<sup>145</sup> Burke, *A Letter to a Noble Lord*, Works, V, p. 188. His American policy of conciliation is one obvious example of Burke the reformer in practice.



Throughout his life, Burke was reconciling the tensions between particular and universal claims. As a young thinker he did so through the medium of writing. As a mature politician he did so through the art of oratory in the realm of imperial politics. His understanding of empire was to be based on consent and mutual interest. It was federal. His idea, as one scholar put it, was an “empire of peoples.”<sup>146</sup> Its unity would be found in respect for what in diverse contexts it held in common. For Burke, it was through particular experiences that one could understand and develop universal principles, which in turn he contended should not be used as a hammer to homogenize peoples, but as a means to cultivate and harness the power of particularity and diversity. Pocock called this quality of Burke’s mind a “philosophy of custom.”<sup>147</sup> America, especially in the context of its place in Great Britain’s Atlantic empire, was a fresh new historical landscape on which Burke could map his developing thought.

Evident in his early works, Burke developed an image of America as necessarily a continuation of Europe. In the North Atlantic the emerging American civilization was an extension of the isles composing the Atlantic archipelago as well as an extension of France. In the South Atlantic, this emerging civilization was an extension of Spain. In all cases the Atlantic world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a place characterized by interaction and interdependence. Burke was eager to learn lessons from the American experience of the Spanish, French, and British that he might have a sound comparative basis on which to criticize and construct existing British imperial policy. As a young Irishman deeply influenced by the history of his own island and his forebears as a conquered people, the connection between America and Europe took on a deeper personal and intellectual significance. Beyond that, as we shall see, Burke was keen to work out the nature and contemporary significance of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European encounter with, outreach to, and reshaping of the Americas.

In this way, while writing about America, Burke was creating an early form of Atlantic history, and his labors in this area bear directly on both his theory of empire and its application to his American politics. By extension, as will be discussed in chapter six, it also shaped the earliest uses of Burke made by Americans themselves during the

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<sup>146</sup> Bruce P. Frohnen, “An Empire of Peoples: Burke, Government, and National Character,” in Ian Crowe, ed., *The Enduring Edmund Burke: Bicentennial Essays* (Wilmington, Del, 1997), pp. 128-142.

<sup>147</sup> Pocock, “Edmund Burke and the Ancient Constitution,” *Politics, Language and Time*, p. 133.

tumultuous between 1766 and 1776. This was the theoretical basis for his famous friendliness to the American cause.

Today we have a notion of the Atlantic Ocean as a fixed entity. But from an eighteenth-century perspective, the Atlantic was huge and small: and increasingly shorter in contemporary history and geographic space. For both Burke and the American colonists, that meant an image of America *nearer* to England and Ireland. When Burke was born, Brechin (Scotland) seemed more remote from London than did Boston; Baltimore, Maryland less barbarous than Baltimore, County Cork. Burke, then, always viewed the development of colonial American history with one eye on Irish history, particularly memories of the Irish experience of English conquest and colonization. It is thus in the personal and national context of Burke's Ireland that the seeds of his American image were first sown.



## 1.

### The Making of an Orator:

#### Edmund Burke's Irish Humanism

Ireland was the preliminary experience for Burke's America. As such, an examination of the Irish associations closest to him is the best place to start. Thomas Copeland once remarked that Edmund Burke "always marched at the head of a clan."<sup>148</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien noted that some of Burke's English contemporaries believed that his family affections were "excessive, in that they went out not merely to his immediate family...but also to what a modern anthropologist would call his 'extended family.'"<sup>149</sup> Burke's clan, his extended family, occupied a dominant position among the elite Catholic gentry of North County Cork. Burke was thus raised in two Irelands: the Ireland of County Cork and the Ireland of Dublin, the capital city. The Ireland of County Cork was the disenfranchised, Gaelic, Catholic, rural, majority Ireland. The Ireland of Dublin was the ruling, "English," Protestant, urban, minority Ireland. Young Burke belonged to both, an obvious source of tension. He was born in Dublin on 12 January 1730.<sup>150</sup> However, he passed his formative years principally among his mother's relatives, the Nagles, exposed to their Catholic gentry and Gaelic culture during a high tide of Ireland's anti-Catholic Penal Laws. Few Irish Catholics were immune from the force of this oppressive legislation, however inconsistently it was enforced.<sup>151</sup> Burke's family was no exception. During the first three years of Burke's life (1731-1733) his Nagle and Hennessy cousins were direct targets of anti-Catholic activity in Country Cork.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas Copeland, *Edmund Burke: Six Essays* (New Haven, CT, 1949), p. 58.

<sup>149</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Introduction," Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York, 1969), pp. 23-24. O'Brien quotes Sir George Eliot in this regard: "Burke has now got such a train after him as would sink anybody but himself..." *Life and Letters of Sir G. Elliot* (London, 1874), II, p. 136.

<sup>150</sup> For the dating of Burke's birth see F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: Volume I, 1730-1784* (Oxford, 1998), p. 16ff.

<sup>151</sup> For a detailed overview of the enforcement and impact of these laws as Burke and his family would have experienced them see, Maureen Wall, *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760* (Dundalk, 1967). Also see, John Brady and Patrick J. Corish, "The Church under the Penal Code," in *A History of Irish Catholicism, volume IV*, (Dublin, 1971), pp. 1-88, and R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1989), pp. 205-211.

<sup>152</sup> See L. M. Cullen, "Burke's Irish Views and Writings," in Ian Crowe, ed., *The Enduring Edmund Burke*, (Wilmington, DE 1997), p. 63.

The successive waves of Norman, Elizabethan, and Cromwellian conquests, and, more precisely, the confiscations and persecutions aimed at effecting Irish subjugation to Britain, had long and profound consequences for Ireland's Catholics. For Burke's family, the costs of the Irish administrative program to penalize Irish Catholicism and of the social divisions *within* Irish Catholicism that resulted from the Penal Laws, and that pitted "impoverished subtenants and laborers" against more "aspiring Catholics," were high.<sup>153</sup> Burke's father, Richard, was likely among the later social group, the aspiring Catholics. He was reared just over the County Cork line in Bruff, Country Limerick.<sup>154</sup> Like many Catholics with aspirations, it seems that he conformed to the Church of Ireland in 1722.<sup>155</sup> Families often selected members to conform to the established Irish church. For Richard, such a strategic conversion was likely made to ensure the success of his professional aspirations as an attorney,<sup>156</sup> to secure his and his family's property, and to provide the opportunity of advancement for his young sons; consequently, of course, Edmund and his brothers were reared Protestant. As Katherine O'Donnell noted, "Conversion to the Protestant religion and subsequent 'discoveries' by these converts of land illegally held by Catholics became a routine part of conveyance in eighteenth-century Ireland." Not surprisingly, therefore, Burke's father was named executor to the estates of two uncles upon his "conversion."<sup>157</sup> Indeed, as Louis Cullen stated, "[W]hether nominal converts or convinced ones, converts retained links with catholic relatives and other catholic families, and their outlook almost invariably remained sympathetic to their former co-religionists."<sup>158</sup>

By Edmund's account, his father had an accomplished legal career. He "never did practice in the Country, but always in the superior Courts" and "was for many years not

<sup>153</sup> See Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 24, 23.

<sup>154</sup> O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 7.

<sup>155</sup> This is a matter of some scholarly dispute. I take my lead here from R. B. McDowell, *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Volume IX, p. 405; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, pp. 3-19; and Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 24, 246. Also, as Kerby Miller noted, "during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries perhaps more aspiring Catholics converted to Protestantism than is usually acknowledged"; in *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 23. In this regard, see Thomas P. Power, "Converts," in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Power and Kevin Whelan (Dublin, 1990), pp. 101-127. For a more uncertain view of Richard's conversion see F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 3-15.

<sup>156</sup> See Patrick Fagan, "Catholics and the Legal Profession," *Catholics in a Protestant Country: The Papist Constituency in Eighteenth-Century Dublin* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 101-125.

<sup>157</sup> Katherine O'Donnell, "The Image of a Relationship in Blood: *Párlíament na mBan* and Burke's Jacobite Politics," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, volume 15, 2000, p. 102.

<sup>158</sup> Louis Cullen, "Catholics under the Penal Laws," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, volume 1, 1986, p. 27.



only in the first *Rank*, but the very first *man* of his profession in point of practice and Credit....”<sup>159</sup> Burke inherited something of his father’s legal interests and emotional “vehemence.”<sup>160</sup> It seems, however, that Burke had a difficult relationship with his father. It was the common understanding of those who knew Burke and who were at least familiar with his father that the latter was as fierce in personality as he was demanding in expectation. Shackleton described Burke’s father as “a man of fretful temper and punctual honesty.”<sup>161</sup> William Dennis echoed this description when he observed that, “My dear friend Burke leads a very unhappy life from his Father’s temper, and what is worse, there is no prospect of bettering it....”<sup>162</sup>

Burke’s mother, on the contrary, remained a Catholic, and according to the custom of the day, so did his sister. Excepting his “vehemence,” Burke seems to have largely inherited his mother’s sensitivities and to have been emotionally closest to her extended family, the Nagles, with whom he lived as a young boy in Ballyduff, County Cork. By contrast, Dublin in the 1730s was an unhealthy and smoke-clogged place. The unpleasant environment of the city and, in particular, the Burkes’ own house on Arran Quay, which faced the Liffey River and was thus damp and cold,<sup>163</sup> presented Mary Burke with the opportunity to send her son to the land of her youth (no doubt in the hope that a sojourn in the countryside would improve his chances for survival).<sup>164</sup> For Burke, as it had probably done for his mother in the past, Ballyduff and the Blackwater Valley offered a healthier environment, both physically and spiritually (as would Ballitore in County Kildare in the early 1740s). These were places of rest and rejuvenation, of fresh air and water, of conversation and conviviality, of friend and family, of hearth and history. Indeed, his clannish view of the family and his reflective sense of history were nurtured in him at the foot of the Nagle Mountains. What he did not always find in his

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<sup>159</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 274. Also see *The Leadbeater Papers: A Selection from the Manuscripts and Correspondence of Mary Leadbeater*, ed. Mrs. Leadbeater, Second Edition, Two Volumes (London, 1862), II, P. 102. [Note: Mrs. Leadbeater was the granddaughter of Abraham Shackleton and daughter of Richard Shackleton.]

<sup>160</sup> See *The Leadbeater Papers*, II, p. 3: “It is but too well known that I debate with great vehemence and asperity....”

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*, p. 95.

<sup>162</sup> William Dennis to Richard Shackleton, *Correspondence*, I, 1747, p. 66 n. 2.

<sup>163</sup> See editor’s note, *Correspondence*, I, p. 125: Burke’s “house in Dublin...often unwholesomely damp from its closeness to the Liffey.”

<sup>164</sup> O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, pp. 15-18; and Lock, *Edmund Burke*, p. 18-20. Only four of Mary’s fifteen children survived into adulthood, and Edmund Burke himself was throughout his life slowed by poor health.

relationship with his parents, he seems to have discovered more fully in his relationship with his Uncle Patrick Nagle, whom he revered as a father figure and who provided “one of the warmest attachments of his life.”<sup>165</sup> It was Patrick and his Nagle cousins, “the good houses of Ballydwalter, Balylegan, and Ballynahaliok” and the “Bawn at Ballyduffe,” that secured Burke’s deepest early attachment and a lifelong concern for their collective welfare.<sup>166</sup> Writing to cousin Garrett Nagle in 1766 Burke effused: “I am really solicitous for the welfare of all the people about the Blackwater, and most grateful for their friendship in this I speak to all our friends, for I consider you all as one, and hope (as I am sure you do, if you are wise) that you consider yourselves in the same way.”<sup>167</sup> He would have been most certainly schooled by his uncles and cousins in his ancient Norman, Gaelic, and Catholic lineage.<sup>168</sup>

Burke spent the formative years from age 6 to age 12 principally with his Nagle kin in the valley of the River Blackwater, which meandered in the shadow of a mountain range named for his Nagle relatives (a connection that may account for a familial sense of “ownership,” and by extension “dispossession,” of that land). His earliest education was conducted in Dublin by his mother, who taught him to read, and then by an “ill-tempered mistress” in a “dame-school.”<sup>169</sup> His first truly formal and rigorous educational experience, however, occurred when he went to Ballyduff, where he seems to have taken up his Latin grammar in a Catholic “hedge school” run by an itinerant schoolmaster of good repute named O’Halloran.<sup>170</sup> While ill-health was the proximate reason for sending Burke to Ballyduff, some biographers also suggest that Burke’s mother may have wanted

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<sup>165</sup> *Correspondence*, I, editor’s note, p. 125. Also see Burke’s subsequent letter to Patrick Nagle, 17 April 1759, in which he says: “There are very few persons in the world for whom I have so great a respect, or whose good opinion I should be more glad to have than yours.” *Ibid.* Burke’s generally affectionate letters, six extant, to his uncle are listed in *Correspondence*, X, p. 157.

<sup>166</sup> Burke to Patrick Nagle, 11 October 1759, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 137-136. “Good houses” refer to homes of Nagle cousins James, Athanasius, and Garrett; the “Bawn at Ballyduffe” refers to an area around his Uncle Patrick’s house.

<sup>167</sup> Burke to Garrett Nagle, undated, circa 1766, *Correspondence*, I, p. 289. See also letter to Patrick Nagle, 21 October 1767, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 328-330; and X, pp. 3-4.

<sup>168</sup> One line of scholarly investigation that might contribute to a deeper understanding of Burke’s relationship to the Enlightenment would be a focus upon networks and links that have had scant attention until now, such as the French-Irish lines of communication built up through trade and through education for Catholic gentlemen in such places as the famous seminary, St Omer. Through his Nagle kin, Burke very likely would have had direct contact with or been a part of such networks and the sources of information and learning that were part of the transit.

<sup>169</sup> Lock, *Edmund Burke*, p. 21.

<sup>170</sup> Prior, *Memoir of Burke*, I, pp. 8-9. Burke attended O’Halloran’s hedge school with his Nagle and Hennessy cousins, including Richard Hennessy, one year his senior, and the future founder of the Cognac house. O’Donnell, “The Image of a Relationship in Blood,” p. 103.

to secure Catholic “grade” schooling as a foundation for her son.<sup>171</sup> As part of this education, an itinerant friar would have instructed Burke. Indeed, recent research suggests that additional instruction in Burke’s hedge school might have been provided by the Jacobite poet Liam Inglis (1709-1778) just prior to his entering an Augustinian monastery in Cork city.<sup>172</sup> Burke certainly shared with his mother a religious nature, much of his early writing exhibiting a deep religious sensitivity. And it was in the hedge school located in the ruins of an old castle where these sensitivities were nurtured and cast for life.

During the time that Burke lived with them and, thereafter during his annual summer vacations spent along the Blackwater, “the Nagles,” according to O’Donnell, “performed their role as Gaelic gentry, sponsoring music and poetry, dispensing profuse hospitality, and patronizing popular sports such as hunting, horse-racing, hurling and cock fighting.”<sup>173</sup> Evidence of these activities are found in a letter of August, 1745, in which Burke wrote apologetically to Shackleton from Ballyduff, “since I left you I have not had time enough to write one line...after I arriv’d the races of Mallow took up 3 Days of my Time after this the Assizes of Cork during which I had scarce a moment’s time on my hands call’d me from performing my promise to you in due time....”<sup>174</sup> Similarly, the following year Burke again wrote Shackleton from County Cork that he had “so murder’d Sleep with dancing these 3 nights past that I can hardly hold up my head....”<sup>175</sup> During such occasions O’Donnell notes, Burke would have gathered to hear the Gaelic poets recite their political verse. These letters give us a glimpse of Burke’s time spent with the “officially” discriminated against but nevertheless socially integrated Nagles. They were penned during a politically charged time throughout Ireland and no doubt included conversations with his Nagle uncles and cousins about the Jacobite uprising and the long-term prospects for Catholics, especially Catholics of some social standing and wealth such as the Nagles.

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<sup>171</sup> O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 20.

<sup>172</sup> O’Donnell, “The Image of a Relationship in Blood,” p. 103; Inglis soon thereafter became a friar and began his career as a noted poet and chronicler of contemporary history from a Gaelic and Jacobite perspective, see Eamon Ó Ciardha “A Voice from the Jacobite Underground: Liam Inglis,” in Gerard Moran, ed., *Radical Irish Priests*, pp. 16-38. Also see, O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 22n1.

<sup>173</sup> O’Donnell, “The Image of a Relationship in Blood,” p. 105.

<sup>174</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 16 August 1745, *Correspondence*, I, p. 54.

<sup>175</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 25 July 1746, *Correspondence*, I, p. 68.

Recent scholarship on eighteenth-century Irish society suggests that “there were fractures and instabilities in subject positions, and at many different moments throughout the century, there were cross-religious, cross-ethnic, and cross-class conjunctions and alliances that opened the possibility of new kinds of social and political formations.”<sup>176</sup> For native Irish Protestants motivated by what they believed was the subordination of the Irish to the English Parliament, this led to the formation of various nationalist or patriotic movements that viewed themselves as the rightful governors of Ireland’s affairs and so advocated greater economic and constitutional liberty.<sup>177</sup> For native Irish Catholics, this meant honing creatively subversive tactics that would give the appearance of docility while in reality resulting in economic and political advancement. In the Irish countryside and city throughout Burke’s years in Ireland, a “surreptitious Catholic challenge to the status quo” was mounting.<sup>178</sup>

The Nagles were, in F. P. Lock’s words, on the “losing side” of recent Irish history by Burke’s time, having had much of their land confiscated by the ascendant Protestant majority at the dawn of the eighteenth century.<sup>179</sup> Both his Burke relatives and his Nagle relations had an active Jacobite past.<sup>180</sup> And even though Burke’s Nagle relatives had “come down in the world,” as Conor Cruise O’Brien argued, they were not “hopelessly downtrodden.” Unlike poor Catholics in other regions of Ireland, the “Munster Catholics of the Nagle class were resilient.”<sup>181</sup> Kevin Whelan described Burke’s relatives as “a well-established sub-gentry family,” a “fusion of long-established rural Catholic families, with close ties to the towns, and links with the Continent and the new world, which backboneed Irish Catholicism.... Prosperous, self-confident, well educated, well connected, aware of external ideas and motivations but firmly rooted in a stable—indeed, in some respects, archaic—rural society and culture.”<sup>182</sup> Whelan, in

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<sup>176</sup> Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712-1784* (Notre Dame, IN, 2003), p. 9

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* See also Bartlett’s chapter “Politics and the Protestant Nation, 1690-1760,” in *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, pp. 30-44; and J. G. Simms, *Colonial Nationalism, 1698-1776* (Cork, 1976).

<sup>178</sup> Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, p. 10.

<sup>179</sup> Some like Lock have located in the Nagles the source for the fact that the “plight of aristocrats or decayed gentilefolk living in reduced circumstances always exerted a powerful emotional appeal on Burke,” see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> See O’Donnell, “The Image of a Relationship in Blood,” p. 104.

<sup>181</sup> O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 18.

<sup>182</sup> Kevin Whelan, “The Regional Impact of Irish Catholicism, 1700-1750,” in W. Smyth and L. K. Whelan, eds., *Common Ground: Essays on the Historical Geography of Ireland Presented to T. Jones Hughes* (Cork, 1988), pp. 252-271.

particular, has established the degree to which a Catholic “underground gentry” developed in the Ireland of Burke’s time.<sup>183</sup> Former owners of confiscated landed estates often remained on as manager-tenants or “middlemen” and in so doing maintained their former prestige and influence. It was through such middlemen that Catholics developed alternative means of economic success. This “surreptitious Catholic challenge to the status quo” would have been witnessed by the young Burke in the country with the Nagles and in Dublin where a Catholic commercial class prospered.<sup>184</sup> It served to highlight for Burke the great need to recognize this fact through legal toleration and equality for Catholics.<sup>185</sup> Burke himself might have responded to such stealth challenges to the Anglo-Irish Protestant establishment by rebellion, conformity, or some accommodating middle way. In what would become characteristic of the mature Burke, he chose conciliation and sided with the Catholic gentry who proclaimed a loyal rhetoric but who furtively pushed the cause of Catholic relief through revisionist historical studies and anonymous political monographs. From the late 1750s through the 1760s, Burke was intimately involved with the activities of the Catholic Committee in Ireland and was their chief penman, drafting their principal documents and petitions and both urging and facilitating the writing of Irish histories that were favorably Catholic in interpretation.<sup>186</sup> Burke’s well-known policy of silence on so much that was personal about him was rooted in the circumstance of his Irish youth. Burke’s commitment to reform, then, might cut two ways: at times in favor of continuity, and other times in favor of change. At the age of sixteen he wrote to his friend Shackleton that “we live in a world where everyone is on the Catch, and the only way to be Safe is to be Silent, Silent in any affair of Consequence....”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>183</sup> See two essays by Kevin Whelan, “An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 10 (1995), pp. 7-77, and “The Catholic Community in Eighteenth-Century County Wexford,” in *Endurance and Emergence*, pp. 129-170.

<sup>184</sup> See the discussion of the economic success of such Catholics in Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>185</sup> See *ibid.* Of course, throughout his life Burke was known for his uncompromising promotion of Catholic toleration, even at the expense of his political career. One need only think of Burke the celebrated public figure confronting a violent mob of anti-Catholic fanatics by drawing his sword and refusing to succumb to intimidation to reverse his position on a vote for toleration during the Gordon Riots in 1780.

<sup>186</sup> See especially, Walter D. Love, “Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographic Controversy,” *History and Theory*, volume 32, 1962, pp. 180-198. See also Walter D. Love’s “Edmund Burke, Charles Vallancey, and the Sebright Manuscripts,” *Hermathena*, volume 95, 1961, pp. 21-35, and “Charles O’Conner of Belangare and Thomas Leland’s ‘Philosophical’ *History of Ireland*,” *Irish Historical Studies*, volume 13, 1962, pp. 1-25.

<sup>187</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 26 April 1726, *Correspondence*, I, p. 62.



Politically, Burke's life in Protestant Dublin would have been complicated by the Jacobite sympathies of his Nagle relatives. How uniform this tendency was within the Nagle family is uncertain.<sup>188</sup> What is certain is that the clannish catholicity of Burke's Blackwater Valley relatives permeated his young mind, searing in his head and his heart a lifelong attachment to the cause of the Irish and Old English sub-gentry and rural poor. This was the crucial early resource that Burke was to draw upon later in life and imaginatively transfer to the plight of other subject peoples and places. As will be considered later in this thesis, Burke's Irish and American historical writings both demonstrate an awareness of and sympathy for the Catholic cause in key events such as the Irish Rebellion of 1641, Jesuit activity in Peru, or confessional conflict in the settlement of Maryland. His interpretations in this regard set him apart from such contemporaries as Hume. This difference is rooted in Burke's family and their past and present condition in Ireland. Indeed, Burke's abiding interest in the nature of conquest and colonization—and by extension the nature of empire and the philosophical question of the relation of the particular to the universal—finds its roots in his family's Irish Catholic history.

Burke's lifelong ability to appreciate other peoples and particular cultures, to transfer himself or enter imaginatively into the plight of subjected peoples flowed from a source deep within him, one that was not, however, self- but family-centered. Burke's school of sympathy was his family, considered broadly to include those few he admitted into his circle of friends and extended "kin." The influence of Burke's "Irishness" in shaping his personality, philosophy, and politics, which has been such a focal point of so much recent Burke scholarship, is nowhere more relevant and in no sense more fundamental to the course of his life and thought than his attachment to the Gaelic ideal of the family. His propensity to draw close to him a tightly knit circle of friends that in turn formed a kind of collective expression of Burke himself is a reoccurring theme in his life.<sup>189</sup> It

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<sup>188</sup> See Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, pp. 16-17 in which he outlines a mixed Jacobite composition of the Nagles, where F. P. Lock asserts the Jacobite connection without qualification in his *Edmund Burke*, p. 14.

<sup>189</sup> Figures such as Patrick Nagle, Abraham and Richard Shackleton, William Burke, his brother Richard, wife Jane, father-in-law Richard Nugent, son Richard, and, ultimately, Lord Rockingham were the great objects of his affection, their interests commonly coming before his own. One could, of course, add other names to the list of those dear to Edmund and the object of his concern, friendship, hospitality, and patronage, including James Barry, James Boswell, Richard Champion, Frances (Mrs. John) Crewe, William Dennis, Gilbert Elliot, Thomas English, David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, Walker King, French Laurence, Garrett Nagle, Charles O'Hara, Joshua Reynolds, and William Windham.

manifested itself personally in the repeated overvaluations he made of various family members (such as his “kinsman” William Burke and his brother Richard, particularly regarding their business acumen). Whatever propensity Burke had toward self-evaluation, it seems to have been subordinate to his concern for the healthy state of his “clan,” his “platoon,” his “train,” his “family.” In this context, Burke’s deep disapproval of, and bitter alienation from, William Gerard Hamilton, his first political patron from 1759-1765, and his subsequent attachment (one that was professionally satisfying and personally affectionate) to Lord Rockingham are extensions or applications of Burke’s essentially Gaelic notion of the centrality of family. Hamilton won and then lost Burke’s loyalty, respect, and service—political cause or party being associated with family in Burke’s Gaelic mind. Rockingham was to win it, nurture it, and provide the kind of fatherly warmth, encouragement, and trust that Burke needed and, indeed, thrived upon.

The Nagles were the model for this Gaelic Catholic ideal, and it was in their midst that he first found an identity and formed a fixed association. It was among them that he learned to speak the Gaelic vernacular (and probably first learned French, too), and though he spoke English at school, he spoke Gaelic when playing with his cousins and otherwise enjoying informal recreation with the Nagles and their neighbors. If religion was a complex matter in his Dublin domestic life, it was a source of unity in his Ballyduff extended family life. Whatever tensions and dualisms Burke may have felt in Dublin were simplified and integrated in the presence—both actual and historical—of his Nagle kin. As Conor Cruise O’Brien observes, “During this period...the young Burke was living in a culture quite distinct both from that of the English Pale in Ireland, that area in which traditionally the English writ had run since its earlier pacification, and where he had all his later schooling and where his parents lived. It was even more distinct from that of southern England, where he spent his maturity and old age. Such an experience, in his early boyhood, could not fail to leave an abiding mark on the personality.”<sup>190</sup>

Beyond his family and the political condition of the Ireland of Burke’s youth, he personally experienced at a young age a series of natural and human catastrophes—including famine, floods, and widespread poverty—and the impact of severe economic dislocation on his family and fellow countrymen in the early 1740s. The stirrings of Burke’s study of the nature and causes of sublime and beautiful feelings can be found in

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<sup>190</sup> Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, p. 22.

his confrontation with the harsh realities of his physical environment. Burke's interest in the theory of aesthetics, the nature and workings of political economy, and a developing interest in natural science can be traced in large part to these early sources. For example, until recently there have been scant references to the impact the Irish Famine of 1740-41, which hit County Cork with particular force, had on Burke's psyche and developing thought. Luke Gibbons is among the first to suggest the significance of the 1740 famine to Burke's later writings, but restricts his analysis to its aesthetical implications for what he calls Burke's "anxious aesthetics."<sup>191</sup> The Arctic Famine of 1740-41, so named for the frigid chill that descended upon Ireland from the North and destroyed the potato and cereal crop, has been called in one study "The Forgotten Famine."<sup>192</sup> It lasted for almost two years and wiped out 20 percent of the population. It settled with great and terrifying force in Munster, especially North Cork where Burke's relations lived. Indeed, R. F. Foster called the famine a "horrifying" local crisis.<sup>193</sup> Gibbons cites one letter from a contemporary that noted early in 1740 "the poor 'in North Cork were already' perishing with cold and hunger, notwithstanding great benefactions given."<sup>194</sup> Burke was living with his Nagle relatives in the region at the time. Gibbons observes that Burke was removed from Cork to attend school closer to Dublin in the very month, April 1741, that the "thaw set in after the unrelenting harshness of the winter. This suggests that he was frozen in for the duration of the famine in the region of North Co. Cork."<sup>195</sup> He would have thus witnessed and/or heard tell of the suffering and painful deaths endured by many Cork families.

Though the extant record of Burke's correspondence does not begin until exactly three years after he left Cork and the "Arctic Famine," we soon thereafter find some evidence of the mark such natural, economic, and human disasters left on the empathetic young Burke, how they powerfully moved his thoughts and emotions both toward reflection and action. In November of 1744 he wrote to Richard Shackleton about the "notions" he had "while employed in the dark and difficult Scenes of nature scanning her

<sup>191</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, pp. 8, 131, 132.

<sup>192</sup> See David Dickson, *Arctic Ireland* (Belfast, 1997), cited in Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 268.

<sup>193</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 199. See also p. 320.

<sup>194</sup> Cited in Gibbons, *Edmund Burke in Ireland*, p. 268, it is a reference from David Dickson's Ph.D. thesis, "An Economic History of the Cork Region in the Eighteenth Century," Trinity College, 1977. Dickson is also cited for his statistics that showed burials in nearby Macroom increased 342% in 1740 and 587% in 1741. According to Sir Richard Cox, also courtesy of Dickson via Gibbons' work, the "devastation of this famine was greater than any civil war or plague" in Gibbons, p. 268.

<sup>195</sup> Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 132.

ends and designs and tracing the almighty Wisdom thro' his works."<sup>196</sup> He was referring to a flood in the River Liffy that inundated his house. In another letter to Shackleton the following January, occasioned by a different flood, he was even more reflective but to the same point:

It gives me pleasure to see nature in those great tho' terrible Scenes, it fills the mind with grand ideas, and turns the Soul in upon herself. This together with the sedentary Life I lead forc'd some reflections on me which perhaps otherwise would not have occurred. I considered how little man is yet in his own mind how great! ... If but one element happens to encroach a Little on the other what confusion may it not Create in his affairs, what Havock, what destruction!... I have a mind to go abroad to Day, my business and my Pleasures require it, but the River has overflown its banks, and I can't Stir without apparent Danger of my Life what then Shall I do, shall I rage fret and accuse Providence of injustice, no, ... Let it shew me how low I am, and of myself how weak how far from an independent being, given as a Sheep into the hands of the great Shepherd of all, on whom Let us Cast all our Care for he Careth for us!<sup>197</sup>

The "notions" such "great and terrible scenes" aroused in Burke were, as will be discussed in the following chapter, developed into and a broad humanistic vision through his formal education, and thus were given expression throughout his aesthetical and historical writing, as well as his later commercial ideas.

## I.

Burke's formative experiences among his outlawed blood kin and the Anglo-Irish world within which they lived were a deep personal motivation for his life-long drive to reform and renew society and the bonds of civility. But it was his educational formation in Irish oratory and the *artes liberales* tradition, combined with his own inclination to think critically about the social purpose of such learning, which in large part shaped Burke's Enlightened religious humanism. Indeed, throughout his life Burke was committed to the broad diffusion of knowledge. He shared with other thinkers of his age a belief that, as Arthur Herman put it, "the advancement of human understanding was an essential part of the ascent of man in history."<sup>198</sup> His role in the *Annual Register* from 1758 until his death is the best testament to this persistent passion. In this effort Burke can be compared to his American friend Benjamin Franklin in the latter's role as author of *Poor Richard's*

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<sup>196</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 37, 24 November 1744.

<sup>197</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 39, 25 January 1744/45.

<sup>198</sup> Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Made the Modern World* (New York, 2001), p. 64.

*Almanack* and printer/publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. From his early years, Burke held a purposeful view of the aims of education. He believed that man's nature inclined toward the integration of ideas and action. In the pages of *The Reformer*, his college newspaper, Burke wrote that, "The first Reflection a good and wise Man has, after his Studies is, how to make them useful to Mankind..."<sup>199</sup> In his *Note-Book* he theorized that, "Experience may show that an entire application to study alone is apt to carry men into unprofitable Subtilties and whimsical notions. Man is made for Speculation and action; and when he pursues his nature he succeeds best in both."<sup>200</sup> Indeed, for Burke, "the End of all speculation should be practice..."<sup>201</sup> Such strong views warrant more considered study of Burke's place in the history of liberal education, which has not been addressed in the scholarly literature on Burke.<sup>202</sup>

Werner Jaeger and Bruce Kimball have argued that, "The history of liberal education is the story of a debate between orators and philosophers."<sup>203</sup> The map of the liberal arts idea moves out historically from its origins in the schools of Isocrates and Plato; while the "distant peaks" that guide are Socratic and Ciceronian. Some generalizations can be made that shed light on Burke's intellectual formation. Cicero was the first to record the connection between the word "liberal" and education. The Romans used the term to refer to an education proper for free citizens with leisure to be suitable for training as a gentleman. His formulation, *artes liberales*, became common in the writings of early Christian and medieval writers and organized into a normative program for education that included seven (*septem*) liberal arts: three concerning language, grammar, rhetoric, logic (or dialectic), and four concerning mathematics or science,

<sup>199</sup> *The Reformer*, number 4, Thursday, 18 February, 1747/8, *WS*, I, p. 86.

<sup>200</sup> *Note-Book*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

<sup>202</sup> Burke's education has not received the attention it warrants. Arthur L. Woehl's dissertation on Burke's reading sheds some light on the matter by highlighting the authors Burke cites in his writing and speeches, "Burke's Reading," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1928; Francis Canavan includes an appendix on "Burke's College Study of Philosophy" to demonstrate Burke's familiarity with Aristotelian and Scholastic works in *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, NC, 1960), pp. 197-211; Peter J. Stanlis does much the same but also includes evidence of his deep reading in the history and philosophy of law in *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1958), pp. 34-40; F. P. Lock provides the basic curricular overview in his now standard biography, *Edmund Burke: Volume I, 1730-1784*, pp. 21-27, 35-47; the lasting impact of Trinity College on Burke through friendships and projects conducted later in his life is usefully considered by L. M. Cullen, "Burke and Trinity College," *Studies in Burke and His Time*, volume 20, number 1, 2005, pp. 82-94.

<sup>203</sup> Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of a Liberal Education*, Expanded Edition (New York, 1995), p. 2. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, three volumes (Oxford, 1943), see volumes I considering Isocrates and the sections in Volume III on that Greek orator.



arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy. While codified in Rome and the Christian Middle Ages, the *septem artes liberales* had Greek antecedents in the so-called “pedagogical century” (450-350 B.C.).<sup>204</sup> Although there is no exact translation from Greek to Latin of the *artes liberales* tradition, elements of the tradition can be found in the schools of the Sophists, Plato, and Isocrates. The Sophists, Gorgias (487-376 B.C.) among them, taught political wisdom merely, the technique for winning arguments regardless of merit, morality, or truth. Plato (427-346 B.C.) opposed the Sophists and upheld the pursuit of knowledge through dialectic, the never-ending search for truth and the process of pursuing knowledge for its own sake.<sup>205</sup> Plato and his followers separated *sophia* from *philosophia*, wisdom from philosophy, two notions that had been understood as an integrated whole, and instead taught that wisdom was to be found only in and through philosophy. Isocrates (436-338 B.C.) agreed with Plato that the Sophist reliance on technique and rhetorical brilliance above all was weakening the moral foundations of Athens. He instead advocated the character ideals found in epic heroes as proper study for orators who might then be able to persuade citizens in the democratic city-state to emulate heroic virtues and character ideals. He was interested in a program that would form intellectual elites. Isocrates was critical of the Platonists never-ending pursuit of truth and their artificial separation of *sophia* and *philosophia*. Rather, he joined oratory to philosophy in his educational ideal, and fashioned a school of moral rhetoric, so that the end of the individual trained in his school was “to speak well and think right.”<sup>206</sup>

According to Henri Marrou, Plato was “defeated” as the Hellenistic and later Roman worlds generally accepted the educational theory of Isocrates—who became “the educator first of Greece and then of the whole ancient world.”<sup>207</sup> Some historians of education identify him as the “Father of Humanism.” If that is too exaggerated a claim, it is nonetheless no stretch to credit Isocrates for being “the supreme master of oratorical culture” and of the “literary kind of education that was to become the dominant feature of the classical tradition....” His school is considered the font for the great tradition of

<sup>204</sup> Frederick A. Beck, *Greek Education, 450-350* (London, 1964). See also, M. L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (Albuquerque, NM, 1971).

<sup>205</sup> Plato, *Lysis* 218a; *Gorgias* 502-522; *Symposium* 203d-204b; *Republic* 394d.

<sup>206</sup> Isocrates, *Antidosis* 277, translated by George Norlin (New York, 1928). See also, *Against the Sophists*, 8.

<sup>207</sup> H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (New York, 1956), pp. 79-91. My discussion of Isocrates is indebted to Marrou. The quotes in this paragraph unless otherwise noted are from him. Marrou claimed Burke to be one of Isocrates’ great modern admirers (p. 79).

forming noble orators and other cultured moralists capable of well-crafted orations full of felicitous phrases, allusions to history and historical figures, imaginatively drawn illustrations, and clearly expressed prose that flourished in the Classical age and set the pattern for education through the Mediaeval and early modern periods.

Isocrates was not a philosopher in the sense of that vocation since Plato had defined it. Rather, he taught the art of oratory in a way both practical and realistic. Whereas Plato viewed rhetoric simply as applied dialectics,<sup>208</sup> Isocrates believed rhetoric was not only an art in itself but the highest art, and it was to be put to the service of the highest ideals of good government. As such, his school became the most successful center “for the formation of men of politics.” His pupils worked under his tutelage to produce their own creative works that aimed to attract their listeners’ imagination and reason, orienting them toward right thinking and action. The mastery of expression gained in Isocrates’ school was put to the service of the public good. It was not indifferent to the moral responsibilities and uses of speech. Success was not the end. Rather, Isocratic eloquence had, in Marrou’s words, “a distinct civic and patriotic purpose.”

Isocratic humanism put education into action with a moral end: justice, virtue, order. Cicero and the Roman humanists extended this understanding, as in some measure did the Patristic fathers of the Christian church, and more robustly the Renaissance Humanists throughout early modern Europe—who renewed it and incarnated that tradition in the idea of the Trivium and Quadrivium. It was this integrated, interdisciplinary, rhetorical, and humanistic educational legacy that formed and oriented curricula in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Boston, and Philadelphia during the eighteenth century.<sup>209</sup> As J.G.A. Pocock has demonstrated, the revival of the Italian republican tradition in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world stemmed from a retrieval and renewal of the humanist educational program.<sup>210</sup> As will be demonstrated below,

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<sup>208</sup> See the *Phaedrus*, 259e-261a, 278b-279a.

<sup>209</sup> See Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, pp. 114-157; R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, “Courses and Teaching in Trinity College, Dublin During the First Two Hundred Years,” *Hermathena* 69 (1974), pp. 9-30; Douglas Young, ed., *Edinburgh in the Age of Reason: A Commemoration* (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 11-13; and Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), pp. 12-28.

<sup>210</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 486ff.

Burke's Irish humanism was nurtured by the oratorical *telos* of his education.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, as Dominique Julia asserts, "the Greek New Testament was one of the texts most commonly read by the Protestants, second only to Isocrates's *Discourses*."<sup>212</sup>

Burke's most lasting educational attachment was to the Quaker boarding school he attended in 1741. In addition to the "Catholic problem," there existed a large population of Protestant Dissenters in Ireland who sided with the Established Church when Catholics were the objects of discrimination but who bitterly resented their own social exclusion and limited toleration by that same Protestant establishment. Thomas Bartlett has observed that, "These penal laws against Dissenters, while obviously not on the same scale as those against Catholics, were nevertheless doubly irksome: first, in that they did in fact constitute a genuine species of oppression; and secondly, in that they were being visited on a group that had been, after all, on the winning side."<sup>213</sup> The dissenting Quakers to whom Burke became so attached shared a common experience with his Nagle relatives, which made his transition easier and the bonds formed with them stronger.

The non-denominational Quaker-run school at Ballitore in County Kildare, some thirty miles southwest of Dublin, was set in a serene and idyllic county. The academic atmosphere was serious and benefited from an ecumenical collection of students from well-born families.<sup>214</sup> Its founder and guiding light, Abraham Shackleton, was a self-taught Latinist who had come to Ireland from Yorkshire as an educational missionary.<sup>215</sup> Initially a family tutor, he founded his academy at Ballitore fifteen years prior to Burke's admission. The curriculum was rigorous, religious, and classically humanist; the Bible and Latin were the centerpieces, and it was left to Shackleton's discretion which of the

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<sup>211</sup> Burke's education, like all education, began orally, which in the folklore-drenched, pre-literate culture of his Irish youth meant an ocean of information—partisan, semi-mythological, sectarian, but still of huge significance in founding his understanding. People may not talk about what they were taught and told in the nursery, pew, or informal moments of their earliest years, but that makes them cherish it no less.

<sup>212</sup> Dominique Julia, "Christian Education," in *Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution*, edited by Brown and Tackett, p. 156.

<sup>213</sup> Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation*, p. 31.

<sup>214</sup> Ballitore, according to Mrs. Leadbeater, from its beginnings "succeeded beyond the humble hopes of its conductors, so that not only those of their own society, and of the middle rank, but many people of considerable note and of various denominations placed their children under their care...." *Leadbeater Papers*, I, p. 27.

<sup>215</sup> He was asked to come to be a tutor for a group of Irish Quakers. See *Leadbeater Papers*, I, p. 27.

“heathen” authors was suitable for study.<sup>216</sup> That Shackleton’s curriculum drew generously from the classic authors is evidenced by the high praise Burke received from his entrance examiners at Trinity College for his knowledge of classical literature and languages. In his first letter to Richard Shackleton, Abraham’s son, Burke recounts how he was examined on Horace, Virgil, and Homer, and had to translate verses from both of the latter two writers. According to Burke, his examiner said, “that I was a good Scholar[,] understood the authors very well and seem’d to take pleasure in them...and that I was more fit for the Colledge than three parts of my Class....” The next day the “Senior Lecturer” again examined Burke, testing him on the “Odes Sermons and Epistles of Horace.” After again demonstrating his facility with a wide range of classical authors and the languages in which they wrote, Burke gained formal admission to the college. In a 1744 letter he acknowledged the debt he owed to Abraham Shackleton for the high praise he received from his Trinity examiners: “I am oblig’d to your Father for the extraordinary pains and care he has taken with me so as to merit the commendation of my Tutor....”<sup>217</sup> In a letter the following year, Burke instructed Richard Shackleton to inform his father that Burke had been awarded an academic prize: “I have got the praemium in my Division...please to acquaint your father with this, for I am persuaded that as My improvement while under his care gave him pleasure, it will continue to do so tho’ I am not immediately so at present, and that this account wont be disagreeable.”<sup>218</sup>

Burke’s Quaker education either instilled in him or reinforced a natural tendency to view the acquisition of knowledge not merely as an end in itself, but as a means by which to improve mankind and effect salutary change. This is the source for what might ironically be called Burke’s utopian side—his passion for reforming society. For all their “inner light” and pretense to other worldly spirituality, Quaker pedagogy also emphasizes the worldly or practical importance of education.<sup>219</sup> Quaker schools, according to the

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<sup>216</sup> See Arthur P.I. Samuels and Arthur Warren Samuels, eds., *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (Cambridge, 1923), pp. 10-19.

<sup>217</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 14 April 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 4 July 1745, *Correspondence*, I, p. 51.

<sup>219</sup> For a detailed overview of the Quaker philosophy of education see Howard H. Brinton, *Quaker Education in Theory and Practice* (Wallingford, PA: 1940), especially pp. 52-108. The author specifically mentions Ballitore and the Shackletons as a “famous” representative of eighteenth century Quaker schooling. *Ibid.*, p. 34. Also helpful in understanding the nature of Quaker educational philosophy is W. A. Campbell Stewart’s *Quakers and Education: As Seen in Their Schools in England* (London, 1953) and Paul A. Lacey’s *Growing into Goodness: Essays on Quaker Education* (Wallingford, PA: 2003), especially chapters two, four, and eight.

Quaker historian, Howard Brinton, were known during Burke's time for their religiously guarded education, their dedicated teachers, their non-violent discipline and methods, their appeal to the inward sense of rightness, their commitment to equality in education for all races, sexes, and classes, their scholastic integrity, and their emphasis on practical subjects in the curriculum.<sup>220</sup> Taken together, this amounted to a kind of social rationalism that critiqued religious superstitions and priestcraft, especially those associated with High-Church and Roman Catholicism, and that found in social reform a means to encourage peaceful cultural and political change.<sup>221</sup> Education was the chief means to achieve these ends, and so it implicitly became an agent for essentially progressive change along Dissenting Christian lines. This early immersion into the cultures of Catholic and Quaker Ireland must have been a shaping element in Burke's later concern to bring relief to dissenting sects such as the Catholics and Quakers that were not seeking to undo the established order.

Although Burke did not absorb Quaker spirituality or theology,<sup>222</sup> he does seem to have internalized Quaker pedagogical lessons, which were rooted firmly in the oratorical tradition. From his earliest years, it was reinforced in Burke that education and knowledge were to be pursued and diffused as a means to make the world a better place. Education was for him "formation," with students thus responsible to use all they had learned to improve society. Burke's *Note-Book* contains an extended early piece on "philosophy and learning" in which he observed:

In our Interests we consider *ourselves* more than we ought; in our Improvements we consider ourselves too little; our learning is calculated for show not for use, and it fares accordingly; for it seldom goes further than the tongue.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Howard H. Brinton, *Quaker Education in Theory and Practice*, p. 53.

<sup>221</sup> This educational legacy suggests that such schools as these descended from the schools that the Brethren of the Common Life operated beginning as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In that cradle was nurtured the Christian Humanism of the Northern Renaissance, which, as has been argued, was one of the sources of Burke's worldview. Although Catholic, the Brethren were, like the Quakers, anti-clerical, advocated equality in education, linked classical learning with Christian faith, promoted careful, honest, and accurate scholarship, and encouraged peaceful reform in society and the church. John Fiske suggested as much in his two-volume study, *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America* (Boston, 1899).

<sup>222</sup> For Burke's criticism of Quaker "Inner Light" theology see letter to Richard Shackleton, 1 November 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p. 36.

<sup>223</sup> H.V.F. Somerset, editor, *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke* (Cambridge, 1957), "Several Scattered Hints Concerning Philosophy and Learning Collected Here From My Papers. [E.B.]," pp. 81-82. Burke read Milton, among his many classical authors, while at Ballitore, [see *WS*, I, p. 26n] and later again, more deeply, at Trinity College. In his essay "Of Education," Milton also makes a humanistic case for the practical ends of education: "The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the



It signifies much less what we read than how we read, and with a view to what end. To study only for its own sake is a fruitless labour; to learn only to be learned is moving in a strange Circle. The End of learning is not knowledge but virtue; as the end of all speculation should be practice of one sort or another....<sup>224</sup>

If my Studies are not of such a nature as to enable me to make a figure in the world, or to acquire some better possession instead of it, what have I been doing?...<sup>225</sup>

I would make an ingenious and liberal turn of mind the End of all learning and wherever I don't see it I should doubt the reality of the knowledge. For the End of all knowledge ought to be the bettering us in some manner....<sup>226</sup>

Relatively early in life, Burke formed the conviction that a broad and humanistic learning, "that part of learning we call Humanity," conveys "those precepts that will be of most use to us in common life...."<sup>227</sup> He was critical of contemporary pedagogy as he was to discover it at Trinity College, Dublin, after he left Ballitore, for the manner in which the "antient authors" were "commonly read and taught." He complained to Richard Shackleton that, "the only use that seems to be made of em [classical texts] is barely to learn the language they are written in, a very strange inversion of the use of that kind of learning! to read of things to understand words, instead of learning words that we might be the better enabled to profit by the excellent things which are wrapt up in em."<sup>228</sup> Burke may well have had some of his old Trinity professors in mind when he later remarked in the *Annual Register*, "He that lives in a college, after his mind is sufficiently stocked with learning, is like a man, who having built, rigged, and victualled a ship, should lock her up in dry dock."<sup>229</sup>

Although Burke believed that education was for active "use," he held a capacious view of the nature of its utility. For example in his *Note-Book*, he considered that, "It is common with men of a small understanding to think nothing of any use, that is not

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nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.... I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), pp. 631, 632. For Milton's great influence on the youthful Burke see Samuels' many citations in, *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*. Also, see Woehl, "Burke's Reading."

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>227</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 25 July 1746, *Correspondence*, I, p. 69.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>229</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1760, "Miscellaneous Essays," "Various Thoughts on Various Subjects," p. 206.

particularly and avowedly designed for use, and apparently so. But in fact there are things that aim obliquely at their end that often hit it more surely. I speak this of such who depreciate the ornamental parts of Learning as Eloquence, Poetry, and such like—and consider them merely as a matter of ornament. I look on them in quite a different light, because I always consider the Chief use of Learning is to implant an elegant disposition into the mind and manners and to root out of them everything sordid, base or illiberal. I consider that the polite arts are rather better calculated for this purpose than any others....”<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, there was an added emphasis on “practical” as opposed to abstract knowledge. Quakerism’s founder, George Fox, began the first schools with the instruction that they were to teach “whatsoever things are civil and useful in creation.”<sup>231</sup> William Penn echoed this sentiment when he wrote that the subject of education should be the created world, as it contained “a great and stately *Volume* of natural things” in which the “Children of Wisdom” can detect the “*Mark* of its Maker.”<sup>232</sup> Even though Ballitore apparently did not excel at the practical arts in its curriculum, the Shackletons did encourage such pursuits.<sup>233</sup> Abraham Shackleton’s Quaker education thus transmitted to Burke an intellectual energy to be put to use for social improvement. Unlike the Quakers who taught him, however, Burke sought to use that energy for the greater good of society as a whole and not merely one of its sub-cultures.

It would thus seem that Burke shared with the *philosophes* a fundamental belief that education was an instrument for reform. This seems ironic given Burke’s famed criticism of the threat “political Men of Letters” and a future “literary cabal”<sup>234</sup> posed to established orders in Europe, and specifically the role they played in preparing and advancing the revolution in France. Although Burke, like most of the Enlightenment thinkers, including Montesquieu who scorned “compilers who have little to say,”<sup>235</sup> believed that the purpose of education was action and social improvement, their view of the ends to which learning was to be put (reform to preserve versus change to transform)

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<sup>230</sup> *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, “Several Scattered Hints Concerning Philosophy and Learning Collected Here From My Papers. [E.B.],” pp. 87-88. History was to become one such “polite art” that Burke was to put to use in his future efforts to “aim obliquely” at advancing his image of and politics related to America.

<sup>231</sup> Quoted in Howard H. Brinton, *Quaker Education in Theory and Practice*, p. 97.

<sup>232</sup> Quoted in Paul A. Lacey, *Growing into Goodness: Essays on Quaker Education*, p. 177.

<sup>233</sup> See Burke to Shackleton, 14 June 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p. 18, regarding Richard Shackleton’s extra-curricular pursuit of a “modern” education in astronomy.

<sup>234</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, p. 160.

<sup>235</sup> Quoted in Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago, 1983), p. 209.

were quite different. This fundamental difference was highlighted in a passage on education and philosophy from Burke's *Note-Book*:

[A man] knows his reason very well and therefore he is suspicious of it. He trusts his passions more on some occasions; he reins them, but does not fetter them. A man who considers his nature rightly will be diffident of any reasonings that carry him out of the ordinary roads of Life; Custom is to be regarded with great deference especially if it be an universal Custom; even popular notions are not always to be laughed at. There is some general principle operating to produce customs, that is a more sure guide than our Theories.<sup>236</sup>

Burke wrote this entry sometime in the late-1740s or early 1750s. As part of his study during this period of the sublime and beautiful, he very early on formed a belief in the importance of shaping and defending what is called "second nature" (customs, habits, mores, manners, etc.) as the first line of defense for conserving and protecting nature itself.<sup>237</sup> Burke's Enlightenment was therefore in many ways a creative engagement with the preceding classical, Renaissance, and Christian Humanist tradition. His politics follow easily from his view of education; or rather his view of education certainly facilitates his political belief. His views in this regard are more akin to the Scottish than the French Enlightenment's view of education, the latter generally holding education to be a revolutionary vehicle necessary to subvert established institutions and conventions, and usher in improved new orders.<sup>238</sup> For Burke, education as a means to improvement meant the improvement of existing institutions and customs, not their radical transformation or utter abandonment. Consistent with the beliefs expressed in his *Note-Book*, Burke later argued in the *Reflections* that, "Your literary men, and your politicians, and...the whole clan of the enlightened among us, essentially differ in these points. They have no respect for the wisdom of others; but they pay it off by a very full measure of confidence in their own. With them it is a sufficient motive to destroy an old scheme of things, because it is an old one. As to the new, they are in no sort of fear with regard to the duration of a building run up in haste...."<sup>239</sup> Again, his reference point for reform was the past, and not an idealized future based on an optimistic view of man's nature and a

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<sup>236</sup> *Note-Book*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>237</sup> See Stephen White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Lanham, MD, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>238</sup> Ernst Breisach, for instance, contended that, "The *philosophes* did not study the past just in order to understand it on its own terms." Rather, historical knowledge was to be disseminated widely and used to "teach the progressive enlightenment of mankind...." In that way education and writing were themselves "instruments of progress." See, *Historiography*, p. 209.

<sup>239</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, p. 138.

conviction that the *telos* of progress would eradicate supposedly outworn customs, established orders, and archaic institutions that stood as impediments to the enthronement of Reason. As Burke wrote later in life, he “would reform, not by destroying, but by saving....”<sup>240</sup>

As will be discussed in the following chapter, seeing in the past a justification for the present and a compass for the future compelled Burke to think through the nature and implications of his own historical sense—which he did largely by writing history for contemporary instruction. His efforts to promote the diffusion of knowledge were thus aimed at assisting society in its active role of conservation and prudent reform. This disposition was fundamental to Burke’s classical and Christian humanism.

Burke returned to Dublin and entered Trinity College on 14 April 1744, barely more than fourteen years old. Academically, Burke’s Ballitore reading in the oratorical tradition was advanced and deepened over the next four years. During the mid-1740s when Burke attended Trinity (1744-1748), “the chief subject was classics.... The Latin theme was still presented by the students, an essay in which he reproduced what he learned from his tutor during the week; declarations were still in vogue, and so were the disputations.”<sup>241</sup> Burke’s “tutors” included John Lawson (1712-1759) and Thomas Leland (1722-1785). These two were among the most accomplished scholars at the College during Burke’s time there, and were among a select group working to renew and preserve the role of oratory in their time. Both held prestigious Erasmus Smith lectureships for the study and promotion of oratory and history, and they were the only two who met the publishing requirements of that appointment: Lawson with the publication of his *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (1758) and Leland with the publication of his co-edited translation, *The Phillippic Orations of Demosthenes* (1754), and his *The History of Philip, King of Macedon* (two volumes, 1758).<sup>242</sup> Burke’s letters to Shackleton are full of reading lists from his courses. He shared them so as to engage and encourage his friend, who stayed with his father at Ballitore as an apprentice headmaster. Virgil,

<sup>240</sup> Burke, *Letter to William Elliot*, 26 May 1795, in *Works*, volume five, p. 126.

<sup>241</sup> M. L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England, 1700-1930* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 24. Also see essay this work is quoted in for more development of the role of oratorical education while Burke matriculated at Trinity, Dublin, John L. Mahoney, “The Classical Tradition in Eighteenth Century English Rhetorical Education,” *History of Education Journal*, volume 9, number four (Summer, 1958), pp. 93-97.

<sup>242</sup> For biographic overviews and primary source selections of Lawson and Leland in this regard see, *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT, 1994), pp. 142-154. For a substantive consideration of themes related to aesthetics and speech see Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca, NY, 1994).

Juvenal, Sallust, Epictetus (to whom Burke said he “owed his life”), Cicero, Homer, Lucian, Terence, Xenophon, Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare were among the authors Burke commended to Shackleton.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, to review the names of authors Burke read and admired during this time, and then compare those with books known to have been taught in his college curriculum, present in his library, mentioned in his writings, or reviewed by him during his life, the list comprises an overwhelming number of writers and thinkers generally included as being central to the oratorical tradition. A partial list to add to those just listed above would include Isocrates,<sup>244</sup> Aeschylus, Demosthenes, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Suetonius, Euripides, Thucydides, Plutarch, Ovid, Virgil, Tacitus, Lucretius, Seneca, Augustine, Bacon, Erasmus, More, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Vattel, Montaigne, Moliere, and others. Notably, Plato’s dialogues and Aristotle’s works are present but decidedly in the background (indeed, Burke’s opinion of Aristotle was uncertain and developed in his life from critical, full of “Errors and absurdities,” to laudatory, “the great master of reasoning”).<sup>245</sup> Burke’s curriculum at Trinity was composed of speculative philosophical texts on logic and metaphysics, but he could be harshly critical of them: “...the hoard of exploded nonsense, the Scum of Pedantry, and the refuse of the Boghouse school—Philosophy....”<sup>246</sup> Hence, Burke was certainly aware of the tension between the Oratorical and the Philosophical tradition in liberal education; which he evidenced at the end of poem written in his *Note-Book*: “And ev’n some friends (that sacred Name) we have/Whom so to keep, ‘tis proper to deceive—

<sup>243</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 10 May 1744 and 25 July 1746, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 4, 8, 9, 69. Also see Arthur L. Woehl, “Burke’s Reading,” pp. 197-211; and R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, “Courses and Teaching in Trinity College, Dublin, During the First Two Hundred Years.” Burke’s reading of historians, ancient and modern, will be considered in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>244</sup> Burke occasionally invokes Isocrates in his correspondence and writings. For example, in *A Vindication of Natural Society* he cited “an Observation which I think *Isocrates* makes in one of his Orations against the Sophists, That it is far more easy to maintain a wrong Cause, and to support paradoxical Opinions to the Satisfaction of a common Auditory, than to establish a doubtful Truth by solid and conclusive Arguments.” *WS*, I, p. 134.

<sup>245</sup> For an intellectual genealogy of the oratorical tradition versus the philosophical tradition, see Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*. For references to such authors in Burke’s extant writings and speeches see Woehl, “Burke’s Reading.” For a catalogue of books in Burke’s library see *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, volume 8, “Politicians,” Seamus Deane, ed., (London, 1973), pp. 179-241. For Burke’s book reviews see, Thomas W. Copeland, “Edmund Burke and the Book Reviews in Dodsley’s *Annual Register*,” *PMLA*, volume 57, issue 2, (June, 1942), pp. 446-468. For Burke’s estimation of Aristotle see Burke to Shackleton, circa 5 March 1744/45, *Correspondence*, I, p. 45, and *Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775), *WS*, III, p. 157 (in which he is referring to a passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*).

<sup>246</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 24 May 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p. 9. For an outline of “metaphysical” books read by Burke at this time and a balanced commentary on what Burke did absorb from the philosophical and the scholastic tradition, see Francis Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke*.



/Who Lofty Notions build on Plato's plan—/And grow quite angry when they find you  
man....<sup>247</sup>

Beyond the “Lofty Notions” and “Crabbed” philosophical aspects of his college class work, socially Trinity was a less congenial environment for the young Burke than was Ballitore; but he did form a close union with several of his fellow students and that resulted in two lasting contributions to his school and city: first, his role in the foundation and leadership of a college debating society known as “The Club”; and second, his role in publishing a college newspaper, *The Reformer*. Language for Burke always had a political element given that the language of his Nagle kin was endangered by the Protestant establishment and given his own need to locate and refine a vocabulary that would allow him to navigate the murky cultural, religious, and political waters of Ireland in the 1740s. Moreover, an education so heavily influenced by Cicero and Demosthenes, combined with his experiences within outlawed Ireland, gave Burke and his company a certain ease of feeling in opposition—played out at Trinity through debate and journalism, and later in life through oppositional party politics.

Indeed, aspects of both these associations shed light on his later approach to, and understanding of, America. For instance, in the first major political pamphlet of his parliamentary career, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), he exhorts party men to combine and effectively oppose the Crown and the “King’s Men” and their “impracticable” and “spurious” policies throughout the “crisis” in North America. As such it was crucial for legislators “To be fully persuaded, that all virtue which is impracticable is spurious; and rather to run the risque of falling into faults in a course which leads us to act with effect and energy, than to loiter out our days without blame, and without use.” The thinking politician, for Burke, acted with considered purpose: “the interest of active men in the state is a foundation perpetual and infallible.” The highest moral character and quality of mind should combine in Burke’s statesman. His early study of the colonization of America provided him with many examples to draw upon and add to his own experience. And as when the American crisis flared and the number of good men of state seemed to him scarce, he warned the King and his ministers that they could not detach themselves from the people through their representatives in parliament, that they do not possess the “power” and “purity” of “angels”; rather in the

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<sup>247</sup> “The Muse Divorced,” circa 1950, directed to William Burke, *WS*, I, p. 49.

*Present Discontents* Burke exhorted in words that echoed from his youthful poem cited above, “we are born only to be men. We shall do enough if we form ourselves to be good ones. It is therefore our business carefully to cultivate in our minds, to rear to the most perfect vigour and maturity, every sort of generous and honest feeling that belongs to our nature. To bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth; so to be patriots, as not to forget we are gentlemen.... To model our principles to our duties and our situation.”<sup>248</sup> As will be argued below, Burke developed at a young age an integrated understanding of taste, morality, judgment, and action.

Burke thus developed a subtle awareness that life lived within the Pale is much more complicated than life lived in the country, whether in Kildare or Cork. For someone with Burke’s multiple loyalties—born as he was a member of the established Irish religion and class, related and attracted to a Gaelic Catholic outlaw class, and affectionately educated by members of a dissenting Protestant class—life in the shadow of Dublin Castle had to be lived on many levels. He was beset on every side and felt deeply the difficulty of his situation. He would have felt it walking the Georgian Streets of Dublin, passing through the Elizabethan gates of Trinity College, and noticing the new season of plays at Thomas Sheridan’s Smock-Alley Theatre.<sup>249</sup> Throughout his life, debating clubs, journalistic endeavors, political party, and rare but passionate and intimate friendships were the natural, organic flowerings from and, importantly, extra-familial substitutes for, Burke’s Nagle clan during the years he was separated from them either in Dublin or London.

## II.

The connection between Burke’s oratorical education and his later political philosophy is evident in the first institutional project of his life, the Club, or “Academy of Belles Lettres” as it was named. The Club was a student debating society begun on 21 April 1747, and was largely initiated by Burke who took down in his own hand the minutes and records of the group. The purpose of the Club, of which there were seven original founders, was captured in Burke’s preamble to its “Laws” promoting the intellectual

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<sup>248</sup> Burke, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, WS, II, p. 320.

<sup>249</sup> For an extended consideration of the role Thomas Sheridan played in promoting anti-Catholicism through his Smock-Alley Theatre productions, and Burke’s response to Sheridan’s theatre, see Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, pp. 117-182.

virtues and establishing the intrinsic unity of speculative and practical wisdom, but of his own preference to subordinating the former to the latter:

A weekly Club instituted for the improvement of its members in the more refin'd, elegant, and usefull parts of Litterature, these seeming the most likely means for attaining the great end in view—the formation of our minds and manners for the functions of Civil Society, for conversation and emulation greatly facilitate and further such a design, any such a design could not at all be carried on without them: Each may become master of the Theory of Arts and science in his closet, but the practice & the benefit & the use of them can only be known and had in Society, there we have fair opportunities for correcting our taste, regulating and enriching our judgment, brightening our wit, and enlarging our knowledge, and of being serviceable to others in the same things. For this purpose 'tis necessary we acquire an habit of expressing our thoughts in an easie genteel sytle and manner, with readiness, justness, force and proper grace.<sup>250</sup>

Burke evidenced disdain for theories hatched by a thinker “in his closet,” and instead advocated the importance of testing speculative proposals “in Society.” Experience was for Burke always an effective teacher. Indeed, it was through “practice” that individual “taste” and “judgment” were confirmed or corrected for the benefit of all. He continued his preamble with a metaphor joining his belief that oratorical habits needed to be acquired by the individual to his understanding of the fundamental connection between sense, language, and truth:

Language is the eye of Society. Without it we could very ill signify our wants of our own relief; and by no means communicate our knowledge for the amusement or amendment of our fellow creatures.... And as language is the cement of Society so is the perfection thereof perhaps its greatest ornament, and not the least of its Blessings....<sup>251</sup>

Burke's governing metaphor here, “Language is the eye of Society,” captured his rhetorical understanding of the purposes of education in the context of an already developed interest in the physiology of perception and the connection between sense perception and knowledge, the means to affect perception through language, and the centrality of such communication in shaping and sustaining, or undermining, society. A year before the founding of the Club, Burke had attended lectures by the oculist “Dr. [John] Taylor” (1703-1772) on the eye, in which the lecturer “endeavored to explode the opinions of the most famous among the ancients and moderns concerning the seat of

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<sup>250</sup> In Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*, Appendix I, “The Minute Book and Notes,” Friday, May 27, 1747, p. 227.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

vision....” Burke dismisses Taylor’s “quack” theories in favor of the more established truths of natural science, which he was also studying during this period, that have survived the test of experience.<sup>252</sup>

The Club debates are the first record of Burke’s “speeches.” It was in the Club that Burke honed his oratorical style and voice. Although for the most part, the minutes of the Club detailed youthful academic debating, there are nevertheless contained within the record of Burke’s input themes suggestive of his later American interests. Two will be of interest in this section: one, the discovery of the utility of “Character” sketches, and two, early articulations of his life-long belief in the connection between the health of the commercial order and the well-being of the polity, between economics and politics.

Burke developed the habit throughout his life of including a variety of character sketches in his writings and speeches. As his greatest nineteenth-century editor, E. J. Payne, accurately observed, “Burke employed with great effect the device, so fashionable in literary works of the age which immediately preceded him, of diversifying his writings by the introduction of what were called ‘characters.’ Under this general denomination were included compendious sketches not only of what was most remarkable in remarkable persons, but also of places, nationalities, opinions, curious and obsolete manners—of anything, in short, of a particular nature, not being altogether foreign to the general purpose, which could be turned to account so as to relieve or to illustrate the performance.”<sup>253</sup>

Burke’s passion for drawing such sketches emerged early in life and he began to perfect the technique in the Club debates at Trinity College. In 1746, Burke wrote to Shackleton and his brother, Richard, “I have I know not how got into the Trade of Character drawing....”<sup>254</sup> The Club’s minute book is filled with a record of his college Characters. At one meeting, a paper was read on the topic of “Luxury.” Burke, president at that meeting, ordered Dennis “to speak in the Character of Cato against Roman Luxury” and Buck “in that of Scipio to oppose him.” After a lengthy exchange on the effects of luxury on liberty, art, virtue, vice, and ultimately, upon the fate of the Roman Republic, Burke “closes the debate by giving his Judgement which was that tho’ Luxury

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<sup>252</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 31 January 1744/45 and circa 5 March 1744/45, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 40, 44.

<sup>253</sup> E. J. Payne, ed., *Select Works of Edmund Burke* (A New Imprint of the Payne Edition), Volume I (Indianapolis, IN, 1999), p. 48.

<sup>254</sup> *Correspondence*, I, E. Burke to Richard Shackleton and Richard Burke, Sr, 29 November 1746, pp. 72-73.

shou'd be disallow'd here ought not be a universal restraint."<sup>255</sup> At another meeting, Burke was ordered "to speak in the character of Gen: [John] Huske for engaging the rebels at Falkirk." Dennis was to speak "in the character of [Gen. Henry] Hawley" and a debate between the two "characters" ensued. The president declared in the chair in favor of Burke's Huske.<sup>256</sup> On Tuesday, May 26, 1747, Burke was ordered to speak "in the character of Brutus the first on the death of Lucretia (to the Romans) which he does."<sup>257</sup> On Tuesday, June 30, Burke was ordered to make a speech against Caesar "in the character of a Roman Senator, at the time he went to command Gaul."<sup>258</sup> And on Friday, July 10, 1747, Burke spoke in the character of Ulysses.<sup>259</sup> At the same time Burke spoke in certain "personated" historical characters, he also delivered famous set character speeches. For instance, he gave Moloch's *speech* from Book Two of Milton's *Paradise Lost* receiving "applause" from the Club for doing so "in Character."<sup>260</sup> And he spoke Othello's speech (Act 1, Scene 3) to the Senate from Shakespeare's play of that name.<sup>261</sup>

Finally in this regard, Burke sketched a "character" in the form of a panegyric to Lord Chesterfield's tenure as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland [a short one of eight months that occurred at the time of the Rebellion of '45 and after which he left for England to become Secretary of State for the Northern Department].<sup>262</sup> A new debate was proposed on the

<sup>255</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday, May 15 1747, in Samuels, p. 242.

<sup>256</sup> "The Minute Book," Thursday, May 21 1747, in Samuels, p. 247. Gen. Hawley (1679-1759) was the commander-in-chief in Scotland who was defeated by the Jacobite insurgents at Falkirk in 1746, and whose "negligence" and "pricipitate orders," as recounted in one memoir, "contributed materially to the disgraceful issues of the day." Major General John Huske (1692-1761) was a decorated soldier who commanded a force at Falkirk that, upon the same account, "checked the pursuing Highlanders and saved the English army from destruction." See *Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk of Penicuik: Baronet, Baron of the Exchequer, Extracted by Himself from His Own Journals, 1676-1755*, ed. John M. Gray (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 193. Burke's mixed loyalties thus found mixed expression in this debate: likely being sympathetic with the Jacobite victory while simultaneously supportive of Huske's heroism in preserving for the English a chance to fight and win another day.

<sup>257</sup> "The Minute Book," in Samuels, p. 250.

<sup>258</sup> "The Minute Book," in Samuels, p. 287. It is interesting to think that in this character speech we have a youthful foreshadow of Burke's later attack on Warren Hasting's pacification of India.

<sup>259</sup> "The Minute Book," in Samuels, pp. 293-294.

<sup>260</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday June 5 1747, in Samuels, p. 266. In Milton's account Moloch is characterized by revolutionary rashness, arguing as he does in Pandemonium for a full-scale revolt against God and the established order. Moloch is obviously a very anti-Burkean character, representing tendencies in civil social man that troubled Burke throughout his life and career. It should also be said that allusions to and quotes from *Paradise Lost* were to figure prominently in Burke's later American writings.

<sup>261</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday July 3 1747, in Samuels, p. 289. This speech of Othello's must have resonated with Burke, filled as it is with the repercussions of being an outsider. It is also suggestive of Burke's later concern for the plight of the "other" and the problems of European colonization associated with settling or integrating non-white peoples into white society.

<sup>262</sup> "The Minute Book," Tuesday June 2 1747, in Samuels, pp. 263-264. Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, (1694-1773); See Samuels, pp. 89-90 for an overview of his tenure as Ireland's Lord-



question whether Ireland received more or less advantage to Lord Chesterfield's present employment than if he had stayed Governor. In this favorable character, Burke was likely to have his Catholic identification in mind. Chesterfield's policy toward Ireland's Catholics during the Scottish Jacobite uprising in 1745 was notable for its non-persecution or subjugation of the native Gaelic Catholics in anticipation of or to prevent the possibility of a similar rebellion in Ireland. This was a change from the policy pursued during times of previous social disturbance, such as the Rebellion of 1641 in Ireland, when priests and laity alike were hounded and harassed. The Catholics, for their part, were also noticeably conciliatory, offering public protestations of support and going so far as to send their leaders to Chesterfield himself with such assurances. Burke would have been aware of this and have supported the new spirit of conciliation between Ireland's Catholic population and Dublin Castle. Instructive in this regard is Burke's own response to the defeat of the '45 rebels, which is cautious yet compassionate, and reveals how early in life he possessed a spirit of conciliation:

This pretender who gave us so much disturbance for some time past is at length with his adherents entirely defeated and himself as some say taken prisoner, this is the most material or rather the only news here, tis Strange to see how the minds of people are in a few days changed, the very men who but awhile ago while they were alarm'd by his progress so heartily cursed and hated those unfortunate creatures are now all pity and wish it could be terminated without bloodshed. I am sure I share in the general compassion, tis indeed melancholy to consider the state of those unhappy gentlemen who engag'd in this affair (as for the rest they lose but their lives) who have thrown away their lives and fortunes and destroy'd their families for ever in what I believe they thought a just Cause.<sup>263</sup>

Burke's testimony that there was a "general compassion" for the defeated Jacobites likely accrued to Chesterfield's benefit in Burke's mind, as Jacobite and Catholic were essentially interchangeable terms. That is what Burke knew about the Lord Lieutenant. What he likely did not know is the degree to which Chesterfield was ready to unleash a devastating attack on the Irish Catholics should they deviate from their promise of "good behaviour."<sup>264</sup> Burke appreciated and supported the public stance of Chesterfield, but

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lieutenant, as well as his role as a prominent man of letters and British statesman see entry in the Oxford *D.N.B.* and W. H. Craig, *Life of Lord Chesterfield* (London, 1907).

<sup>263</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 26 April 1746, *Correspondence* I, pp. 62-63.

<sup>264</sup> Consider a letter from Chesterfield to the Duke of Newcastle, October 24, 1745: "The papists here are not only quiet, but even their priests preach quiet to 'em. The most considerable of 'em have been with me to assure me of their firm resolution not to disturb the government, and to thank me for not having disturb'd them, as usual at this time. I told 'em very fairly that the lenity of the government should continue as long

would have been unaware of the blackmail that characterized what was seemingly a positive development for the position of Catholics in Ireland. And so it was this Chesterfield whose character Burke lionized in the Club—the Chesterfield who Burke believed promoted “ye good of his Fellow creatures”—and whose presence he wanted to maintain in Ireland for that very reason: “The opportunity a man can have of promoting ye good of his Fellow creatures, is proportionate to his wisdom, his wealth, or his power and ye good done in either case, will be more or less according to his Sincerity and Inclination. But it is ever observed that ye conferrer glows with a more candid (as more *disinterested*) affection, than the obliged: As God’s love surpasses that of his Creatures; and as the Father’s is more tender, and lasting than ye Son’s.”<sup>265</sup> Burke nevertheless criticized his Chesterfield for pursuing mammon in England rather than the larger “benefits” of authority in Ireland.<sup>266</sup> Still, the dominant image of Chesterfield held by the young Burke was as someone who exercised restraint in wielding power, in this case the power to suppress Catholics during a time of an insurrection that Catholics would have been thought to be sympathetic toward. It is a distinguishing element of his later sketches that they are vehicles he used to make larger moral points or arguments of interest to him. In this sketch, then, the longest recorded in his debate book, Burke could be fully authentic to both parts of himself, the Gaelic Catholic Edmund and the Ascendancy Protestant Edmund.

In the extant records of The Club one also discovers the earliest articulation of Burke’s views on commerce and the central role commercial society plays in bringing political and economic benefits to nations and peoples within the empire (which was to be a principal concern of his mature politics). It is here that we discover in Burke evidence of what Pocock has termed “a commercial humanism.”<sup>267</sup> Pocock employs this phrase as shorthand for the term political economy, a social science only just emerging

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as their good behaviour deserv’d it, but that if they gave the least disturbance they should be treated with a rigour they had never yet experience’d. I have very good intelligence of ’em and I cannot discover they meditate any disturbance.” See W. Ernst, *Lord Chesterfield* (London, 1900), I, p. 307. Also see, F. J. McLynn, “‘Good Behaviour’: Irish Catholics and the Jacobite Rising of 1745,” *Eire-Ireland*, 16 (1981), pp. 52-53. For a fuller description of Chesterfield’s relation to and policy toward Irish Catholics during his Vice Royalty see Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, pp. 119ff.

<sup>265</sup> “The Minute Book,” *ibid.*, p. 263. Emphasis added.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>267</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, “The Political Economy of Burke’s Analysis of the French Revolution,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Chicago, 1985), p. 194. See also Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment*, “The Eighteenth-Century Debate: Virtue, Passion and Commerce,” p. 462-505.

during Burke's youth. Burke's "commercial humanism" developed from his observations on how best to establish and sustain the beneficial economic conditions of life within the larger envelop of an evolving society's historic mores, culture, and politics.<sup>268</sup>

During the early weeks of the Club, debates on imperial commercial policy and other matters touching on Irish/English relations were deemed by some members to be crossing a politically sensitive line, and taking a course that might lead some to offer open criticism of the King to whom they had sworn allegiance as a condition for entering Trinity College. Andrew Buck, a co-founder of the Club, perceived this complication with reference to a debate on the English destruction of the Irish wool industry and quickly moved that "such subjects are not fit matter for debate in this Assembly." He further moved "that a law be made to restrain us in the choice of our subjects for that all such which in the discussion of the question will make us shew any dislike to his majesty or his ministry is improper—that questions relating to the government of our country are ticklish points & not fit to be handled."<sup>269</sup> Burke was the principal voice of dissent on this question. As the minute book recorded, "Burke answers him—thinks that to restrain us in considering what would be more usefull to our country would take away a most considerable part of our improvement & that there is no danger of our showing any disloyalty to his Majesty...." One week later, Buck formally proposed the new Law: "No questions relating to the Government of our country which may possibly affect our loyalty to be handled in this Assembly."<sup>270</sup>

No record of a debate on the question beyond Burke's objection is recorded. The notes state simply that the Law was "carried." Burke's subsequent silence on the question suggests that his sense of dual loyalty must have been keen, and perhaps occasionally challenged by Club members during more informal moments. He must have known he was on weak ground in terms of relying merely on his persuasive abilities to carry his point. Still, the incident is revealing in at least two ways. First, it suggests that Burke was fashioning a view of empire in which Ireland was a vital component and, as such and in that context, justified critiquing British imperial policy with regard to Ireland, not in a

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<sup>268</sup> For an extended discussion of economic themes in Burke's mature writings and speeches, see Francis Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke* (New York, 1995); and Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 191-227. Both overlook the roots of his commercial views in his earliest writings.

<sup>269</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday May 1, 1747, in Samuels, p. 235.

<sup>270</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday May 8, 1747, in Samuels, pp 237-238.

spirit of disloyalty to the Crown, but rather as a measure to improve the government of the Empire. Implicit in Burke's views at this stage was the notion that the prosperity of one arm of the Empire redounds to the benefit of the entire imperial body. Second, the disagreement demonstrated Burke's willingness to challenge the prevailing policies and thinking of his day in the service of genuine reform.

The theme of the nature and right uses of commercial trade policy was one of the many subjects debated at the Club. Burke's interest in this subject developed from this time forward, but some of its first manifestations are recorded in the Club's minutes. In one case, Burke argued in favor of taxing absentee landlords as "the only means of preserving some part of the little money in the Kingdome which appropriated to ye Dublin Society might prove a great advantage to it..."<sup>271</sup> Another debate was held on the aforementioned destruction of the Irish woollen industry by British Parliaments, according to Samuels, to "satisfy the commercial jealousy of English manufacturers." The woollen controversy was then flaming due to political radical and apothecary Charles Lucas's (1713-1771) public agitation of the issue,<sup>272</sup> and the formation of Court and Country parties as a result (the former pressing the English interest, and the later advancing Irish demands for the free trade of wool).<sup>273</sup> "Burke and the members of the Club were fully abreast of the controversies of the day on this subject," Samuels argued, and Burke proved in this case to be an "early advocate of ideas similar to those which find such splendid expression in his speeches and writings in later life on Irish and American commercial freedom."<sup>274</sup> The issues the Club would have debated on this point necessarily would have included questions such as, Who controls trade policy, the British parliament or colonial parliaments and assemblies? More fundamentally, members would have considered the constitutional issue of native subordination to an imperial center and the nature and extent of colonial dependence. It is no wonder that Andrew Buck detected

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<sup>271</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday, May 29 1747, in Samuels, p. 252. Of course, this differs from his later view against such a tax as expressed in his 30 October 1773 letter to Sir Charles Bingham. Lord Rockingham was an absentee landlord, and in addition to his deepening confidence in the workings of the market for the benefit of nations and the Empire, Burke's love for Rockingham no doubt colored his views on this issue throughout the rest of his life. See *Correspondence*, II, pp. 474-481.

<sup>272</sup> See Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*, p. 234n.

<sup>273</sup> For more detail on this controversy see Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, pp. 53-84.

<sup>274</sup> Samuels, p. 234n. Interestingly, Samuels contends that as a result of British wool policy Irishmen were forced to emigrate—mostly to the American colonies. Consequently, they brought with them an animosity toward the English that contributed to the anti-English commercial spirit in America and to the temper of the American Revolution. Also, see Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford and New York, 1985), pp. 137-168.

a potentially seditious line of thinking in this debate and quickly proposed the law to restrain the Club in its choice of subjects. Through experience, Burke had formed by this time a cautious, but not ideological, bias against commercial restrictions of this kind and may well have wanted to grapple with this issue (another likely reason why he resisted Buck's motion). Trade was to become for Burke the "cement" of empire, and a debate of this kind would have given him the opportunity to work out verbally a theory that reconciled the demand for the freedom of Irish commerce with the advantages to be gained by giving up some commercial rights to the imperial center.<sup>275</sup>

Another debate on the nature of trade concerned Andrew Buck's proposal of a "Bill" to regulate the press and prevent the piracy of British books by Irish printers, a serious problem in the early eighteenth century.<sup>276</sup> Burke argued in favor of the "Commendable Bill"<sup>277</sup> against Dennis's contention that the Bill was detrimental to printers. "Grant then," said Burke, "the Printers should suffer; Yet the Profit of that set of men, should not weigh down the advantages of ye whole Nation whose Honour and Happiness depend on ye improvement of Arts & Sciences, and ye Advancement of Learning. And it is of much more moment to encourage ye writers & authors of Books, than consult ye sole interest of ye Printers." After arguing that the interests of the nation trump the interests of a particular commercial group, Burke proceeded to explain his understanding of the laws of trade themselves and the often unintended consequences of trade regulation:

Besides ye check that learning will feel if Piracy be longer countenanced...that the world will soon be overstocked with Editions of ye Books now among us, and this Trade will suffer a stagnation when ye fountain is stopped, that supplies it. When every other shall have leave to use dishonest means for a copy, & then undersell ye first purchaser: all will be afraid to purchase at all; And consequently when no Reward, adequate to ye trouble, we shall have few new books; few will undergo ye toils of writing, when ye Price of the work is brought to that low ebb, nay, when there's no Price at all. Printing was invented, not for Trades, but the advancement of Litterature, which, with this Bill, will fall to the ground. As for ye Monopoly, no man can engross ye whole Trade; when ye Printers can afford a proper Rate for Compositions. We shall have them in more abundance & more correct and, it will be impossible for one man to monopolize; since different writers will publish enough to employ the Printers.... The Money, which [Mr. Dennis] says would go out of the Kingdom, experience shews, we are even now

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<sup>275</sup> For a more thorough discussion of this issue in the context of Burke's youthful Ireland see Francis Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke*, pp. 1-46.

<sup>276</sup> See Samuels p. 269n.

<sup>277</sup> "The Minute Book," Friday June 5, 1747, in Samuels, p. 273.



drained of, & that through this very practice of Piracy. 'Tis the dread of it, makes Stationers send to England & Holland; which they are afraid to run the risk of having Printed here. A man that could make anything by his own Press would never be dependant on that of others: But now this chance of Profit, by Printing, is precarious; But ye gain, from retailing, though small, is sure, and consequently men will rather send out money for Books, than run into Expenses, for which there is no certain prospect for a return: So that it is plain, were there no Piracy, there would be little importation.<sup>278</sup>

Burke's contributions to Club debates over Irish trade policies generally represented the kind of arguments he would advance when later he was at the center of debates over imperial commercial policy toward America. This "commercial humanism"—both in the sense of his methods and in the subjection of commerce to human and societal ends rather than mere profit—was further developed in the pages of his college newspaper.

If Burke's Club or "Academy" supplies the first record of his oratorical prowess and the development of a unique voice in which to engage matters of public interest, his writing and editing labors for his newspaper, *The Reformer*, provides a similar record of his early concerns and his skill at putting his writing at the service of salutary social reform. And it does so in much the same way as his activity in the Academy Belle Lettres; indeed, they closely parallel each other. Burke's work on *The Reformer* gave him experience in and a taste for social and literary criticism through the medium of journalism. More significant, it also resulted in a belief that such writing might be advanced at the service of social change.

*The Reformer* was a weekly paper that ran to thirteen numbers, from January 28 to April 21, 1748. It is an important component of Burke's youthful corpus as he was a principal writer and lead editor, and it was his first serious literary enterprise. It foreshadows his more famous journalistic production, the *Annual Register*, both in form and in range of content and subject matter. Also, like the *Annual Register* and early works such as *A Vindication of Natural Society*, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, and the *Address and Petition of Irish Catholics*, *The Reformer* was an anonymous production.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> "The Minute Book," *ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>279</sup> As with each of the aforementioned anonymous works, determining Burke's contributions to *The Reformer* has been a matter of debate and controversy. Some contemporary scholars argue that Burke wrote all, or at least the vast majority of it himself. T. O. McLoughlin is one so convinced. See his, "The Context of Edmund Burke's *The Reformer*," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ii, (1987), pp. 37-55; and "Did Edmund Burke Write *The Reformer*?", *Notes and Queries*, 237 (1992), 472-477. Others take a more moderate view

Burke's role in producing it is salient to his writing on America during the next decade principally as an early stimulus and outlet for expressions of the commercial dimension of his humanism. Although the ultimate objective of *The Reformer* was to reshape the tastes of the Irish public and encourage the cultivation of native Irish genius and literary talent, it also contains some especially strong elements that suggest Burke's growing awareness of the importance of a properly ordered and balanced economy for the flourishing of both individual and society. This is evident in *The Reformer* No. 7,<sup>280</sup> in which Burke engaged the issue of political economy in a manner that prefigured his more sustained efforts in later tracts and speeches. In the following passage, Burke demonstrated that a rich nation is not one that provides for its "Gentry" merely, but rather is one that creates opportunity for all its members to work, earn, and lead comfortable lives. By the late 1750s and throughout his political career, as will be argued in the ensuing chapters, Burke argued that the best way to "secure lives and property" was for the government to promote freer trade and restrain itself from undue regulatory interference in the economy. In the 1740s, he was just coming to grips with the human and financial cost of a penal society with a command or mercantile economy. As he observed:

The Riches of a Nation are not to be estimated by the splendid Appearance or luxurious Lives of its Gentry; it is the uniformed Plenty diffused through a People, of which the meanest as well as the greatest partake, that makes them happy, and the Nation powerful. When this is wanting, the Splendor of the Great is rather a Reproach than Honour to them.... It is the Care of every wise Government to secure the Lives and Properties of those who live under it. Why should it be less worth Consideration, to make those Lives comfortable, and these Properties worth preserving?"

Burke spoke from the depths of his youthful experience when he lamented that, "Whoever travels through this Kingdom will see such Poverty, as few Nations in *Europe* can equal. In this City Things have the best Face; but still, as you leave the Town, the Scene grows worse, and presents you with the utmost Penury in the Midst of a rich soil."<sup>281</sup>

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and attribute only those signed *AE* to Burke himself. See F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 54-59. I follow the latter approach here.

<sup>280</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 7, Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1747-48; in *WS*, I, p. 96ff.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

The “Penury” that so disturbed Burke is vividly described with the kind of visceral edge borne of direct experience and meant to shock the complacent Dublin elite out of their slumber and, he might have wished, into reforming action. To that end, Burke observed that, “though the People have but one small Tax of Two Shillings a Year, yet when the Collector comes, for Default of Payment, he is obliged to carry off such of their poor Utensils, as their being forced to use denotes the utmost Misery; those he keeps, until by begging, or other Shifts more hard, they can redeem them.” He continued:

Indeed Money is a Stranger to them; and were they as near the Golden Age in some other Respects, as they are in this, they would be the happiest People in the World. As for their Food, it is notorious they seldom taste Bread or Meat; their Diet, in Summer, is Potatoes and sour Milk; in Winter, when something is required comfortable, they are still worse, living on the same Root, made palatable only by a little Salt, and accompanied with Water: Their Cloaths so ragged, that they rather publish than conceal the Wretchedness it was meant to hide; nay, it is no uncommon Sight to see half a dozen Children run quite naked out of a Cabin, scarcely distinguishable from a Dunghill, to the great Disgrace of our Country with Foreigners, who would doubtless report them Savages, imputing that to Choice which only proceeds from their irremediable Poverty. Let anyone take a Survey of their Cabins, and then say, whether such a Residence be worthy of any thing that challenges the Title of a human Creature. You enter, or rather creep in, at a Door of Hurdles plaistered with Dirt, of which the Inhabitant is generally the Fabricator; within-side you see (if Smoke will permit you) the Men, Women, Children, Dogs, and Swine lying promiscuously.... In this manner all the Peasantry, to a Man, live; and I appeal to any one, who knows the Country, for the Justness of the Picture. Who, after having seen this, comes to Town and beholds their sumptuous and expensive Equipages, their Treats and Diversions, can contain the highest Indignation? Such Follies considered in themselves, are but ridiculous; but when we see the bitter Consequences of them, ‘twere Inhumanity to laugh.<sup>282</sup>

The force and passion with which Burke painted his “Picture” stemmed from his experience of Irish life close to the source of the conflicts facing colonial Ireland at that time. The result was a grim realism and a tragic sensibility that were effective in rousing the passions, for the reader can almost “feel” what Burke felt and visualize the “irremediable Poverty” that Burke must have witnessed personally: language was for him, after all, the “eye” of society. From Cork to Kildale to Dublin and back again, the reader travels along with Burke when he encountered a dwelling that resembled a “Dunghill” hardly fit for a fellow “human Creature,” or when he “creeps” into a

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

“Residence” of dirt and smoke and encountered half-naked people living “promiscuously” with their beasts. Burke clearly wanted the reader’s passions to be roused not for the sake of pity, but for action, for reform, and in so doing presaged the power of his later political speeches.

Furthermore, Burke argued as a follow-up to his grim picture of Irish destitution that those who possess property are also obliged to exercise responsibility. His analysis, though, did not incline him to a radical egalitarianism or proto-communism; rather, he allowed for social inequity as being natural to the human condition writ large. The qualification is that stewardship is a condition of ownership, and the ownership of property, especially large tracts of land, is a social trust. Burke stated it thus: “I fancy, many of our fine Gentlemen’s Pageantry would be greatly tarnished, were their gilt Coaches to be preceded and followed by the miserable Wretches, whose Labour supports them. That some should live in a more sumptuous manner than others, is very allowable; but sure it is hard, that those who cultivate the Soil, should have no small Part of its Fruits; and that among Creatures of the same Kind there should be such a Disproportion in their manner of living; it is a kind of Blasphemy of Providence, and seems to shew, as our Motto finely expresses it, ‘the Heavens unjust.’ Our modern Systems hold, that the Riches and Power of Kings are by no means their Property, but a Depositum in their Hands, for the Use of the People: and if we consider the natural Equality of Mankind, we shall believe the same of the Estates of Gentlemen, bestowed on them as the first Distribution of Properties, for promoting the Public Good: And when, by the Use they make of their Fortunes, they thwart that End, they are liable to the same or a greater Reproach than a Prince who abuses his Power.”<sup>283</sup>

Burke seemed here to be recalling the propertied class to their rightful vocation to recognize and act according to their great responsibilities to promote the welfare of their fellow man. It is not clear at this point in his life how far he was willing to pursue the radical analysis he put forth, but it does seem that even at this young age he was inclined to support the social function of aristocracy, one based, however, on both natural abilities and on birth. Indeed, Burke here seems to emphasize the importance of what we might call “breeding.” From the foregoing, it seems that he found it an appealing quality. It is the person of good breeding who recognizes and fulfills the social obligations that

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<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

accompany their status and office. In this formulation, breeding represents an alternative not only to unrestrained ambition, which Burke would not have countenanced, but also an alternative to merit alone. There are, after all, many men who gained wealth, position, and power through their own abilities and efforts. Only men of breeding recognize the obligations they accumulate along the way.

For Burke, the insensitivity of the ruling Irish to the plight of the majority of their countrymen and their concomitant abuse of the power entrusted to them was appalling in itself, but the injustice was made more grievous because the land itself was arable and held the potential to unleash abundance. Burke contended that this seemingly “irremediable” situation could be corrected only if more prudent, more sensitive, one might even say more enlightened, political and economic management were applied to the problem (though Burke conceded that “The Evil is easier seen than remedied...”<sup>284</sup>). Burke’s stern analysis turns to the “Englishness” of the ascendant class and their tendency to view Irish matters through the prism of English conditions, with disastrous results: “Gentlemen perceiving that in *England* Farmers pay heavy Rent, and yet live comfortably, without considering the Disproportion of Markets, and every Thing else, raise their Rent high, and extort it heavily: Thus none will hold from them but those desperate Creatures who ruin the Land (in vain) to make their Rent...thus one part of the Nation is starved, and the other deserted.” In this early account, as in his later writings on the economics of scarcity,<sup>285</sup> Burke spoke with a personal edge and intensity; that is, he spoke from experience, as an eye-witness to the harshness of starvation and desolation such as he lived through seven years earlier. And, too, in this as in later writings circumstance (in this case Irish circumstance as opposed to English) framed the “Evil” in question. The solution was to be found in examining and applying the principle appropriate to the circumstance that could best contribute to its resolution. For Burke, as we saw above in his description of the gross spectacle of Irish poverty, a bad or horrifying experience provided the occasion for the soul to turn in upon itself and dwell upon the implications and possibilities with which that experience confronted it. For the sensitive and informed observer, it was an opportunity for deep reflection and prudent action.

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<sup>284</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 7, *WS*, I, p. 99.

<sup>285</sup> See Burke’s economic writing as related to Ireland and Irish trade in *WS*, IX, especially his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, pp. 119-144.



Burke's method is again put to use here. In this particular case, his encounters moved him to dream of a healthier Ireland and to suggest a better "Way of thinking." In a sketch of a "Gentleman of Fortune," which reads like a parable, Burke advanced his view of the advantages that come to all from the far-sighted and disinterested management of the few, and again, he spoke from the high ground of experience:

He [the Gentleman of Fortune] came early to the Possession of an Estate valued 2000 *l. per Ann.* But set to a vast Number of Tenants at a very high Rent: As usual in such Cafes, nothing could be in a worse Condition than his Estate; his Rents ill paid, the Land out of Heart, and not a Bush, not a tolerable Enclosure, much less a Habitation, to be seen. He found his Leases out, but he did not study, with the Greediness of a young Heir, how to raise the Price nor Value of his Lands, nor turn out all his poor Tenants to make room for two or three rich. He retained all those to whose honest Industry he had been a Witness, and lowered his Rent very considerably; he bound them to plant certain Quantities of Trees, and make other Improvements. Thus in a few Years Things had another Face, his Rent was well paid, his Tenants grew rich, and his Estate increased daily in Beauty and Value: There was a village on it, which was equally ruinous with the rest; when he designed the Improvement of this, he did not take the ordinary Method of establishing *Horse-races* and *Assemblies*, which do but encourage Drinking and Idleness; but at a much smaller Expense he introduced a *Manufacture*, which, though not very considerable, employed the whole Town, and in Time made it opulent. Notwithstanding all this, no Person lives more hospitably in the Country, in the Town more genteel. I have often heard him discourse on this Subject. "I have lowered my Rents (says he) but how much am I the poorer? What Gratification do I want? Tis true, I have not every Month some new invented Carriage coming from England to make the Town amazed at my Folly; I keep no French Cook, I wear my own Country Manufactures; by which means I save, I believe, more than I lose by the Lowness of my Rent: At the same time I am satisfied I am making Numbers happy, without Expense to myself, doing my Country Service without Ostentation, and leaving my Son a better Estate without oppressing any one."<sup>286</sup>

Burke then added the following commentary, "Had many of our Gentlemen the same just Way of thinking, we should no doubt see this Nation in a short time in the most flourishing Condition...."<sup>287</sup>

The practical outlet for Burke's commercial humanism, one that looks to social good, was sunk deep into the concrete circumstances of his Irish youth. Indeed, the economic dimension of Burke's humanism is hard to underestimate. It permeates his writings from an early age. Characteristically, he integrated the liberal or "polite arts"

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<sup>286</sup> *WS*, I, pp. 99-100.

<sup>287</sup> *WS*, I, p. 100.

into his descriptions and analyses of social dislocation, as is evidenced in one description of the unrelenting spectacle of Irish poverty in its rural locales. On his many trips in the 1740s from Dublin to the Irish countryside he would have chance for other such encounters with the poverty and distress that were caused in large part by the political and economic disadvantages faced by the great majority of Irish people. They set Burke's mind toward the impact of trade and commercial policies within Ireland and within the empire. They fashioned his "commercial humanism." Unlike the many political and commercial leaders of his age, who resided principally in metropolitan centers such as Dublin or London, Burke saw and was deeply affected by the worst effects unwise economic policies can have on a disadvantaged people (and be especially catastrophic during times of natural disaster). Hence, such experiences represented some of the earliest sources for Burke's abiding interest in the impact and justice of imperial commerce, as well as seeing a major source of these dislocations in the arbitrary management of a majority population by a minority governing establishment—all of which was to be particularly relevant to his later historical and political thought.

### III.

*The Reformer* was principally concerned with a political question that preceded Burke's commercial concerns: the connection between the arts and public morality, between taste and the manners of a people. As a collective effort and a product of Burke's young circle of friends, *The Reformer* was no mere student newspaper. It happened to be the product of students, but its audience was all of literary Dublin and its ambitions were lofty: to reform the tastes of the Irish public and encourage the cultivation of native Irish, as opposed to imported English, genius and literary talent. In the mid-1700s, establishment Irish politics was challenged by an emerging patriot movement inspired in large part by the works of George (Bishop) Berkeley (1685-1753), Samuel Madden (1686-1765), William Molyneux (1656-1698), and Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). This tide crested in the later 1700s and led to the establishment of an independent Irish parliament in 1782.<sup>288</sup> During Burke's time at Trinity College, the patriotic pamphleteer, Charles Lucas, was the

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<sup>288</sup> Burke attempted to postpone deliberation on the creation of an independent Irish Parliament, and would play a very small role in Ireland's attempt to secure it. The reason he hesitated in 1782 reveal a key difference between Burke and the Irish Protestant Patriots that was as true in the 1740s and is was to be in the 1780s; namely, Burke was always more alarmed by Irish injustice to Ireland than by British injustice to Ireland.

political flashpoint for this cause, running a polemical race to be elected one of Dublin's two Aldermen in 1748-49. Whether Burke supported Lucas at this time is a matter of debate,<sup>289</sup> however the founding of Burke's *Reformer* is evidence that Burke took an active interest in the patriot cause so far as it concerned the encouragement of native Irish talent. And he generally did so in a way different from Lucas's "contemptible Talents," lack of "common Sense," and "fanatical spirit," as Burke would call it in a letter to an Irish friend in 1761, by which time he was "somewhat out of humour with patriotism."<sup>290</sup> If Burke did not exhibit fanaticism for the patriot cause during his Trinity College days, he certainly advanced elements of it with enthusiasm and verve.

It is important to recall as a matter of background, that the social tension which existed between those of natural talent and those of inherited, aristocratic stature was a hallmark of eighteenth-century Anglo-Atlantic culture. "What then is the American, this new man?" J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur once asked.<sup>291</sup> Crèvecoeur's answer was animated by the Enlightenment spirit of his age: "the American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions." Burke, too, self-consciously viewed himself as a "New Man," a freshened Ciceronian image of the *Novus Homo*. Throughout his life Burke would have to prove himself in the established classes of English society that often viewed him as an "Irish Adventurer." As Copeland observed, "Edmund, his brother Richard, and their so-called 'cousin' William, had set out on their careers in the 1750s with very few advantages indeed besides their collective wit." Indeed, for many Edmund was "scarcely an individual," as Copeland put it, but was seen as part of "a collective entity known as 'the Burkes.'" To make their way and fortune they held close together, and so, "In the ordinary innocent sense of the term they were certainly 'adventurers'"—believing that natural Irish talent was not encouraged in Dublin, and even less rewarded in London.<sup>292</sup>

William Burke recalled Edmund Burke's personal identification with this ideal: "[Edmund] gave then an account of his own education. He took to himself the appellation of a *Novus Homo*. He knew the envy attending that Character.... He expatiated upon the

<sup>289</sup> For an overview of the state of scholarship regarding Burke and Lucas see F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, pp. 59-63. Also informative and enlightening is Helen Burke's consideration of Lucas and Burke and the Dublin stage in *Riotous Performances*, pp. 117-182. For biographical sketch of Lucas see 2005 Oxford *D.N.B.* entry by Sean J. Murphy.

<sup>290</sup> Burke to Charles O'Hara, 3 July 1761, *Correspondence*, I, p. 139.

<sup>291</sup> *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York, 1997), pp. 43-44.

<sup>292</sup> Copeland, *Our Eminent Friend, Edmund Burke*, pp. 45-46.

Impropriety and danger of discouraging new Men, This rising merit....”<sup>293</sup> Burke sounded a similar note near the end of his life in *A Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796) when he argued that society should prize and promote men solely on the basis of natural gifts and industriousness. Indeed, Burke warned against discouraging such “new men.” “If they are precluded the just and constitutional roads to Ambition,” he wrote, “they will seek others” and in so doing may work to subvert the established order.<sup>294</sup> And so Burke proclaimed that “All wise governments have encouraged rising merit, as useful and necessary; we know not in what mountain of Scotland, what bog of Ireland, or what wild in America that Genius may now be rising who shall save this country.”<sup>295</sup> Ireland, Scotland, and America—each a satellite of the imperial center with a history of conquest by Britain and resultant struggles to achieve full acceptance and integration into the British constitutional order were now the cradle of “new men” able and willing to lend their extraordinary talents in service to the empire. It was incumbent on the English aristocracy to recognize this development and find ways to accommodate it for the present and future good of England.

In the pages of *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757), one finds early evidence that Burke believed America in particular offered promise to those “unfortunate men” who from the circumstance of birth, social status, or religion—“the frowns of the world”—could not of themselves rise to the level of their abilities; but now might find such a prospect in the North American dominions of Britain, “an opportunity of going where this prejudice does not operate against them, they set up as new men.”<sup>296</sup> And while still a young man he optimistically assured his friend Richard Shackleton in verse that, “As merit which can never be long conceald/By its own Lustre always is reveal’d.”<sup>297</sup> Burke conceived of *The Reformer* as a means to assert the arrival of such a breed of Irish new men, and to demonstrate their natural critical talent while advocating for their fellow countrymen to demand more recognition of homegrown, as opposed to imported, talent.

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<sup>293</sup> William Burke to William Dennis, 3, 6 April 1770, *Correspondence*, II, p. 128.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>296</sup> *Settlements*, Chapter VIII. pp. 106-108.

<sup>297</sup> Burke to Shackleton circa 5 March 1746/47, *Correspondence*, I, p. 86.

Burke was a great admirer of Alexander Pope's satirical writing,<sup>298</sup> and *The Dunciad* seems to have inspired at least the articulation of *The Reformer's* project: to conquer the "Empire of *Dulness*" and overcome the "Depravation of Taste" and "Morals." The first lines of the first number read as follows, "There is a certain Period when *Dulness* being arrived to its full Growth, and spreading over a Nation becomes so insolent, that it forces Men of *Genius* and *Spirit* to rise up, in Spite of their natural Modesty, and work that Destruction it is ripe for. If we may judge of the Empire of *Dulness* by other great ones, whose Unwieldiness brought on their Ruin, this is certainly its Time; for the Depravation of Taste is as great as that of Morals, and tho' the correcting the latter may seem a more laudable Design, and more consistent with *public-Spirit*; yet there is so strong a Connection between them, and the Morals of a Nation have so great Dependence on their Taste and Writings, that the fixing the latter, seems the first and surest Method of establishing the former."<sup>299</sup>

Burke and his associates believed they were such "men of genius and spirit," Irish new men and "Wits." As such they had a responsibility to encourage or promote what was best for Ireland. *The Reformer's* proximate target, then, was the "Dulness" and derivativeness of the Dublin Theatre, represented especially by the policy of its dominant figure, Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), manager of the Theatre Royal in Smock-Alley, to promote English authors and plays at the expense of native Irish talent.<sup>300</sup> As scholars have noted, however, "there was a class politics behind the 'Wit'/'Dullness' aesthetic in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century English literature; writers who defended 'Wit' were also tacitly defending a traditional aristocratic order, and their attack on 'Dullness' was a covert attack on the emerging middle class.... [However] it had a very different valence in Ireland where the opposition between the old elite and the new rulers coincided with the opposition between native Irish and planter. In the Irish context a resurgence of Irish 'Wit' could be read as a resurgence of a native elite."<sup>301</sup>

Burke's own understanding of the subversive potency of this tactic is evident in his anonymously published handbill, *Punch's Petition to Mr. Sh[erida]n to be Admitted to the Theatre Royal* (1747-1748), wherein "Punchinello" requests admittance on the

<sup>298</sup> See Woehl, "Burke's Reading."

<sup>299</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 1, Thursday the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1747-8, in *WS*, I, p. 66.

<sup>300</sup> See Esther K. Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock-Alley* (Princeton, NH, 1967), and the entry in the 2005 Oxford *D.N.B.* by Peter Thomson.

<sup>301</sup> Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, p. 152.



grounds that he knows Sheridan “will encourage an ingenious Native preferable to a Foreigner, as your Petitioner is descended from the Ancient British Harlequins...and that it is not his wont of Merit, but his being Body and Soul of Irish Manufacture, which makes him neglected, he being able to shew more Feats of Agility, and has besides that advantage over them, that to his admirable Postures he adds his admirable Wit, a Quality they don’t even pretend to.”<sup>302</sup> Burke thus presents himself ironically as just such an “ingenious Native” “Wit”; and also someone from the class of Old English or a person of Irish “Manufacture” (hence, Catholic) protesting the barriers he faced in gaining admittance to the Irish theatre.

Burke and his fellows were often biting in their condemnation of Irish society’s obsequious deferral to British taste, and more generally to a country that “esteemed” Irishmen to be among “the dullest of Mankind,” where there is “scarce a Scribbler among them who has any other name for this nation than BOETIA.” Burke continued, “I don’t know for what we deserved the Appellation more than the senseless Encouragement we give their wretched Productions...that we were bound to support them, while they despised us in return.”<sup>303</sup> Sheridan’s plays were also notoriously anti-Catholic and thus for Burke added more fuel to his indignation.<sup>304</sup> In terms of the impact of England’s colonizing experiments in Ireland as it was experienced in Burke’s time, the *rhetoric* of England’s conquest regarding the nature of the Irish people was as important as its political, economic, and religious legacy. For along with the Norman and then Tudor/Elizabethan political and cultural conquest of Ireland, there was an equally, if not more, significant “construction” of the nature of the Irish people as alternatively or together “wild,” “ignorant,” “uncivilized,” “irreligious,” “superstitious,” “idolaters,” “savage,” “infidel,” “pagan,” “barbarian.” Associated with the terminology invoked as descriptive of the native Gaelic and later Old English Irish people was a series of ethical and legal considerations raised by England’s conquest of Ireland. Along with David B. Quinn, Nicholas P. Canny, in several studies on the “ideology of English colonization,”

<sup>302</sup> Copy in the British Library (1890. e. 5), for Burke as “Punchinello” also see Esther Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan*, p. 127 and F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 54-56, and Helen Burke, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>303</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 1, p. 67. According to the editors’ note: Boetia referred to a region of Greece “scorned in classical times for its dull and uncouth inhabitants, largely because they were cattle farmers.” See note 6, *WS*, I, p. 67. Some years prior to writing this in the *Reformer*, Burke and Shackleton used the same imagery in their poem, “Ballitore.” See Samuels, *The Early Life, Correspondence, and Writing*, pp. 156-159; and *Correspondence*, I, p. 90.

<sup>304</sup> Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, pp. 117ff.

demonstrated “how the justifications for colonization influenced or reflected English attitudes toward the Gaelic Irish and, by extension, toward the imported slave and indigenous populations in North America.”<sup>305</sup> Burke’s later disgust with British policy in America stemmed in part from a realization that Westminster once again was ignorantly applying such misguided Irish constructions—ignorant, heathen, savage, uncivilized—to America and its peoples; the results of which were to be as destructive to the long-term interests of the Empire as were the Irish policies that derived from the image the English held of the Irish.

In addition to the more subversive, anti-colonial agenda of Burke’s paper, *The Reformer’s* stated target was the reformation of public taste and morality. Burke’s friend and roommate, William Dennis, told Shackleton that he and Burke “talk of nothing but the subversion of the present theatrical tyranny...and the establishing taste...by (what is esteemed as uncommon) the force of Irish genius, and establish Irish productions in place of English trash....”<sup>306</sup> Burke and his Trinity circle had witnessed the “Gentleman’s Quarrel” of the preceding year in which a drunk “gentlemen” was expelled by Sheridan from the theatre, only to touch off a series of protests from the Irish Protestant establishment in Dublin, which were eventually settled by a court ruling against Kelly. Burke wrote a long letter to Shackleton recounting the affair. He and his friends sided with Sheridan in this case. Dennis did so because Kelly and his supporters “acted contrary to all Rules of Modesty and Good-Breeding.” Burke did so on the grounds that the rioters did not respect “the ties of honour or Religion.”<sup>307</sup> His writings on public taste and morality were an early application of his college study of aesthetics, which as will be discussed in the next chapter would flower a decade later into an influential treatise on the subject. He was eager in this paper to put some of his aesthetical theories to use:

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<sup>305</sup> See in particular Nicholas P. Canny, “The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, volume 30 (1973), pp. 575-598; *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established: 1565-1576* (New York, 1976); *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560-1800* (Baltimore, MD, 1988); “Spencer’s Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s,” *Past and Present*, number 120 (August, 1988), pp. 201-209; and *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650* (Oxford, 2001). For David Beers Quinn see “Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577) and the Beginnings of English Colonial Theory,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, volume 89 number 4 (December, 1945), pp. 543-560; and “Explorations and Discoveries,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, volume 45, number 3 (July, 1988), pp. 569-573.

<sup>306</sup> William Dennis to Richard Shackleton, 14 January, 1747, in James Prior, *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith, M.B., from a variety of original sources* (Philadelphia, 1837), p. 53, 58-59.

<sup>307</sup> Quoted in Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances*, p. 156. On Burke’s extensive report to Shackleton on the Gentleman’s Quarrel, see *Correspondence*, I, 21 February 1747, pp. 82-84.

namely, to reform society through criticism. As Stephen K. White has argued, “This desire for improvement counterbalanced by a concern to contain it within an existing order is one manifestation of perhaps the most resilient tension in Burke’s mind.”<sup>308</sup>

In *The Reformer* 3, Burke argued that actors, as much as writers and producers, were complicit in the “Propagation of Vice” that was the effect of the Dublin theatre. For Burke, public corruption through the arts formed a vicious cycle, one that implicated the writer, the player, the audience, and ultimately society; as such, a concern to correct the corruption of morals or manners was for him a patriotic obligation or duty. As Burke put it, “A Stranger can have no better Way of forming a judgment on the People’s Manners, than by going to one of their Plays, for as the politest are gathered for their Instruction or Entertainment, it must be supposed that what they suffer, they certainly approve, and accordingly as the Diversion is lewd or moral, coarse or polite, wild or ingenious, it speaks the Sense of the People. How much then should any Man, who regards the Honour of his Country, endeavor the Correction of Stage Abuses?”<sup>309</sup> He then elaborated on his concern for the trivializing effects of gratuitous violence, and called for an end to indiscriminate clapping and hissing. In all, this reflected his grounding in classical theatre and the low opinion he held of the English theatre. Consistent with his view that education was for use, he believed that the purpose of the theatre was ultimately educational, with a particular emphasis on character and moral education.<sup>310</sup>

In *The Reformer* 6, Burke moved from criticizing the corrupting effect of the contemporary Dublin theatre and its English preoccupations, to challenge his readers to support more generously artists and writers of native genius and “juster Taste.”<sup>311</sup> He chastised those whose worldly pursuit of wealth so preoccupied them that they both ignored the socially corrupting effects of modern art and theatre and, through their negligence and even participation, became themselves agents for decadence: “The Desire for Lucre is become almost the general Spring of Action, and it has never produced any but mean ones....”<sup>312</sup> Burke challenged those of wealth and talent to assume a greater social responsibility in this important cultural area. In recounting a conversation with a

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<sup>308</sup> Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Lanham, MD, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>309</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 3, Thursday the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, 1747-8, in *WS*, I, p. 79.

<sup>310</sup> In this regard see also Burke’s *Hints for an Essay on the Drama* (c.1761), *WS*, I, pp. 554-563.

<sup>311</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 6, Thursday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1747-8, in *WS*, I, p. 92.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

“Friend” and “Man of good Sense and a sincere Lover of this Country,”<sup>313</sup> Burke related the latter’s contention that there was a marked decline in “Polite literature in this Kingdom” and a “clash of sentiments” happening in contemporary Dublin. The friend warned that, “No Man can stand out as it were from the rest of the World; for when Fools become so numerous as to over-bear the thinking part of Mankind, they get the Laugh on their Side. By these means our Gentry become only externally distinguishable from the Vulgar; and being inured to Vice and Folly, are pleas’d with nothing that does not savour them....”<sup>314</sup> Burke’s own growing sense of alienation was implicit in this last sentence. He came from the very Irish “Gentry” being criticized, and which he agreed with: “the more I considered it, the more Reason I had to fear the Truth of my Friend’s Assertions.”<sup>315</sup> He thus was awakening to the deeply personal stake in the “reformation” *The Reformer* sought to achieve. Burke here evidenced an “awareness that he is a product of the very anti-thesis he points to in eighteenth-century Ireland.”<sup>316</sup> An existential contradiction was pushing its way to the surface of Burke’s mind and writing.

In the end, the acquaintance was too fatalistic for Burke. “These things,” his “Friend” remarks, “shew the Flood of Barbarism to be at the highest, and ‘tis vain to oppose it. There is a Fatality in all Things, some Ages shine with the Light of Science and Virtue, while others are buried in the grossest Darkness: These mutually and naturally succeed each other as Night does Day; and when it comes to any Nation’s Turn to fall in Ignorance, Experience shews it can no more be avoided than the Change of the Seasons. Men may see it, and complain of it, but it serves only to disquiet themselves, not prevent the Evil.”<sup>317</sup> Unlike his “Friend,” however, Burke did not take the easy way out; he would not admit that cultural “Barbarism” is inevitable, that the Irish Gentry had no hope to reverse their fortunes, that their current sad state was no more to “be avoided than the Change of Seasons.” Rather, Burke played the hopeful role of “The Reformer,” and answered, “That the Encouragement of bad Things was not the peculiar Fault of this Age,

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<sup>313</sup> Helen Burke identifies Burke’s “friend” as Paul Hiffeman, a poet, playwright, sometime philosopher, and, according to the *D.N.B.*, a former Roman Catholic seminarian who was among Dublin’s able but “marginalized Catholics,” *Riotous Performances*, pp. 180 ff. He was considered “the quintessential new author by profession,” Betty Rizzo in 2005 Oxford *D.N.B.* Although as Rizzo notes with importance to this excerpt, he was notoriously lazy and unreliable.

<sup>314</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 6, Thursday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1747-8, in *WS*, I, p. 92.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>316</sup> “Editors Introduction,” *WS*, I, p. 16.

<sup>317</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 6, *WS*, I, p. 92.

as in all Times Blockheads at their first Appearance had the best Reception....”<sup>318</sup>

Renewal was still possible. And for the remainder of his life, Burke labored on behalf of the Protestant gentry and was to be a successful champion of Catholic relief and toleration.

Interestingly, as Burke was no Pollyanna, the source of his belief in the possibility of renewal was not naïve optimism. Instead, as detailed above with regard to his observations of Irish poverty in *Reformer* 7, it stemmed from a tragic view of life and a profound sense of history nurtured in him by his closeness to the reality of the Irish condition. His reaction was one of humility, not despair or fatalism; and a developing recognition of the reality of human finitude and limitation that often was tested by the reality of human willfulness. While at Trinity, Burke noted that “the Spirit of humility [was] the greatest of Christian virtues,” and in his *Note-Book* he wrote that, “Whatever tends to humble us, tends to make us wise.”<sup>319</sup> Thus, Burke’s hope was theological as much as political, and in a manner characteristic of him, became a practical source for his motivation that the end of the knowledge and experience one acquired in life ought be a means to “do” something to improve the human condition: as he put it in *Reformer* 4, “The first Reflection a good and wise Man has, after his Studies is, how to make them useful to Mankind.”<sup>320</sup> While the possibilities are limited, and thus resist utopian designs, still, Providence allows room for free individuals to make rational choices that can reverse or remedy collective “Ignorance” and the social consequences that follow from it.

However, Burke did concede that a dangerous corruption had set in, that “the Taste for irrational Pleasures has made the Souls of many so callous, as not to be sensible of any thing delicate.”<sup>321</sup> Hence the time for action was at hand. The “desire for lucre” and the “taste for irrational pleasures” are the two “Passions” Burke believed to be undermining the Irish literary and cultural community—and by extension the people, maybe especially the native Irish gentry who were finding increasing commercial success and accumulation of real wealth in Dublin.

In *The Reformer*, he went a step further to blame the cause of this grave problem on the fact that the “young Gentlemen of this Age, partly from Nature, partly from

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<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

<sup>319</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 15 October 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p.33; and *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, p. 85. See Stephen White on this point in his *Edmund Burke*, p. 8.

<sup>320</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 4, *WS*, I, p. 86.

<sup>321</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 6, *WS*, I, p. 92.



Education, have got a low kind of Prudence, and are taught to think every Thing that does not gratify the Senses, unsubstantial and trifling....”<sup>322</sup> This, then, was the source of Burke’s gravest concern: that the rising generation, being the product of the very culture in need of reform, will not have developed a sufficient knowledge and esteem of those areas that were the surest “Spring of Action.” He worried that as these “young Gentlemen” aged and took their place in society, sophisticated patrons would not emerge because “the only Soil proper for producing generous patrons...as well as good Writers”—“the Love of Glory”—was being destroyed in Ireland; crushed by the “empire of dullness.” Unfortunately for Burke, the condition of Irish society at that time frustrated the flowering of his own brand of Irish humanism. Yet, he never ceased to argue for the connection between the commitment of society to cultivate taste, judgment, and manners and the overall health of the civil social order.

These were some of Burke’s principal concerns at the end of his tenure at Trinity College, just two years before he left Ireland. In many ways the vehemence Burke’s father exhibited in his insistence that Burke had to leave Dublin in 1750 for the Middle Temple (he was actually enrolled three years earlier) was understandable. He must have worried that his talented young son was getting too involved in local political controversies and polemical writing with other marginalized Catholics in a way that could only be damaging to his professional prospects. Burke’s father saw reform journalism and theatre debates as dead-ends. His attitude also sheds light on why he continued to oppose his son’s journalistic endeavors in the mid-1750s as they were associated in his mind with the Dublin theatre disputes and Lucas controversies of 1747-49. But emerging opportunities for a career in politics eventually allayed such fears. And after all, Burke’s efforts in the Club provided the occasion to move from reading rhetoric to the active development of his rhetorical skill. In that way it prefigured his later political speech craft. Burke’s work on *The Reformer* gave him experience in, and a taste for, social and literary criticism through the medium of higher journalism. In that sense it was a precursor to the historical writing and journalistic efforts begun a decade later. More significantly, both experiences resulted in a humanistic belief that such speaking and writing might be advanced in the interests of social change. Posterity has benefited

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<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

from the failure of Burke's father to discourage him from such enterprises, as well as from his success in moving the young Irishman along to London at just the right time.



## 2.

### “Do You Think of America?”:

#### Recovering Burke’s Neglected History

Burke’s passion for history was established in Ireland. As argued in the first chapter, it probably began with exposure to fireside narratives, hedge-school masters, local folksongs, and the like. His curriculum at Ballitore and Trinity included a generous measure of history, principally Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus.<sup>323</sup> This emphasis suited the bent of the young Burke’s mind, for as he wrote to Richard Shackleton, one of his academic “Sallies of passion” was “the furor historicus.”<sup>324</sup> This passionate sally into history is a likely reference to his reaction to the ’45. In July of 1746, in the wake of the Jacobite uprising of the previous year, Burke responded in part by reading “some history.” “I am endeavoring,” he reported to Shackleton, “to get a little into the accounts of this our own poor country.”<sup>325</sup> A few months earlier, in April, he spoke of the ’45 as “the most material or rather the only news here.”<sup>326</sup> The Jacobite uprisings kindled, or perhaps rekindled, in Burke an interest in the history of Ireland, and especially the nature of the British conquest.

Conditions were ripe for such a turn to history. The rebellion of Scottish Jacobites roused the passions of Catholics in Ireland. Consequently, the uprising in Scotland pitted Burke’s countrymen emotionally, if not in act, against each other. This condition was a flashpoint for all the anxieties and fears Burke had for the plight of his Catholic kin in the wake of the deprivation, impoverishment, bloodshed, and degradation that was the legacy of the previous century of Irish history. And in fact there were anti-Catholic tensions and rising fears of a “papist conspiracy” in North Cork during this time, and in Dublin, according to L. M. Cullen, the rhetoric of Protestant sermons commemorating “the massacres that followed the outbreak of rebellion in Ulster on October 23, 1641, reached

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<sup>323</sup> See Arthur L. Woehl, “Burke’s Reading,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1928; and R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin, 1592-1952: an Academic History* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>324</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 21 March, 1746/47, *Correspondence*, I, p. 89.

<sup>325</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 12 July 1746, *Correspondence*, I, p. 68.

<sup>326</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 26 April 1746, *Correspondence*, I, p. 63.

a high pitch in 1745 and 1746.”<sup>327</sup> Burke was spending his summers in North Cork during this period and the academic year at Trinity College. The highly, but differently charged air in both places turned his mind to Ireland’s past to seek resources for a better Irish future. What he discovered, however, did not encourage him. He later referred to the early accounts of his country as “those miserable performances which go about under the names of Histories of Ireland....”<sup>328</sup> Burke could be impatient with the tendency of historical antiquarians to view produced histories filled with labored details, dry archival work, and, as he put it in his review of Hume’s histories, “the recital of uninteresting facts.”<sup>329</sup> He was interested in facts as a way to give color and life to meanings, which in turn would make such facts more useful for contemporary instruction.<sup>330</sup> Burke was never cavalier about facts, quite the contrary was true. Rather, he hoped for the production of histories that yielded evidence which would allow for critical, yet imaginative, reasoning about the meaning of events and lives.

Burke henceforth committed himself to promoting a more impartial and objective Irish history that would go back to the sources. He was confident that in doing so the new Irish historian would produce enlightening yet reliable accounts, rectify partisan prejudices, and uncover “an interior history, the genuine voice of its records and monuments, which speaks a very different language from these histories....”<sup>331</sup> As with other historians of his age, Burke believed that individual actors, themes, and “great causes and events,” as he put it in his 1769 review of William Robertson’s *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, were much more interesting and important than slavish attempts at chronology.<sup>332</sup> In the same review, he also explicitly joined to his complaint about what he saw as the poverty of historical works on Ireland, the same opinion about the histories of America at the time of its discovery: “Thus, enquiries into the most dark and interesting subjects, which required the acutest discernment, under the direction of

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<sup>327</sup> See L. M. Cullen, “Edmund Burke and Trinity College,” *Studies in Burke and His Time*, volume 20, 2005, p. 88; and L. M. Cullen, “The Blackwater Catholics,” pp. 535-583.

<sup>328</sup> Burke “Tracts Relating to Popery Laws,” *WS*, IX, pp. 478-479.

<sup>329</sup> Review of David Hume’s *The History of England*, *Annual Register*, 1761, p. 302.

<sup>330</sup> For an appreciatively critical statement along these lines, see Burke’s review of *The Antiquities of Athens*, by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Annual Register*, 1763, pp. 247-249: “By the study of antiquities, history is frequently explained and confirmed, and sometimes corrected. Facts and manners are rendered more distinct, and their impression becomes infinitely stronger and more lasting.”

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid*, p. 479. See chapter six for notice of the Irish histories Burke read.

<sup>332</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1769, p. 255.



the best formed judgment, to be applied to their investigation, were abandoned to the indiscriminate zeal of antiquaries, or the undistinguished labour of compilers.”<sup>333</sup>

In his attempts to encourage the expression of what he believed would be a “genuine voice” of the past, Ireland and America became the earliest fields in which he cultivated his thinking about history. Burke wrote history to chronicle the confrontation of peoples in order to better understand the development and contemporary significance of national character, laws, mores, and institutions. This distinguished his historical output from French thinkers like Voltaire whose preoccupation with historical writing was as a means to highlight injustices in the existing regime and encourage the delimitation of clergy and nobility. Burke wrote history the better to understand how and what to conserve or reform; Voltaire wrote history to promote significant social and political change.<sup>334</sup> All of which is to say that generally speaking Burke wanted the past to tell or teach him what it was, and that without such knowledge the present and its discontents were to him incomprehensible and perilous. Whereas history to Voltaire was telling the past what lessons he wanted it to teach the present.

Specifically, Burke’s interest in the study of man and in the political, cultural, scientific, economic, and religious dimensions of human existence, led him to chart the clash of civilizations in medieval Ireland and England as well as in the New World and, through his journalism, the Seven Years War in contemporary Europe (known as the French and Indian War in the North American theatre). Burke’s historical studies thus were directed to the meaning and origin of existing societies. He was a student of national character. To this end history provided Burke with pragmatic possibilities. Burke was keen to learn from the newer critical techniques, but not only for the purposes of method. The “uses” of such learning were of greater importance to him. History served, for Burke, to provide exemplars of instruction; and it was an especially effective teacher of prescriptive norms and standards for character formation. As such, his motive in writing it was to inform more than to arouse or amuse—although he believed strongly that historical writing must not be dull, but should entertain while it instructs. This was largely accomplished through pleasing style, accessibility, mastery of sources, and the ability not only to see but to communicate the drama of man operating in history. The

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* He made those comments in the context of praising Robertson’s historical method.

<sup>334</sup> See Peter Gay, *Voltaire’s Politics: The Poet as Realist* (Princeton, NJ, 1959), pp. 100-115; and Bernard N. Schilling, *Conservative England and the Case against Voltaire* (Columbia, NY, 1950), pp. 239-240.

writing of history provided the occasion to heighten the quality of the imagination, of the intuitive and inductive aspects of knowing. Reason could not be, for Burke, ahistorical. Rather, right reason was a faculty for Burke that joined the universal dimensions of life to the historical.

## I.

Burke's personal and historical interest in Britain's American colonies began two decades prior to his becoming Hamilton's and then Lord Rockingham's secretary. His earliest mentions of America in his extant correspondence and writings reflect the prevailing images of an alien land whose native inhabitants were alternatively strange and marvelous, portrayed as being "savage" or imagined as being "noble" and having descended from places and times in a classical past that was so much a part of the early modern mind.<sup>335</sup> In particular, Burke exhibits in his early correspondence the playful uses he could make of the common image of a bloodthirsty New World. In 1744, Burke wrote to Shackleton an ironic "Elogium" about a wished for fate of a disliked fellow student in which he expressed hope that the young "Chevalier" could be sent to "Nations inhabited by fiercest barbarians" with "uncultivated morals."<sup>336</sup> But he could also put such images to serious uses in criticizing the manners and morals of his own time and place. For instance, Burke wrote to Shackleton the following February lamenting an injustice for a falsely accused woman, and compared the attacks on her character and consequent damage to her reputation to the noiseless sweep of death over the "many thousands of our brave countrymen [that] fatten the belgick and american plains with their blood."<sup>337</sup> He, thus, equated the savage justice he saw meted out in Dublin to a place where reckless zeal and assassination abound.

Two years later in the *Reformer*, Burke again employed a negative American stereotype to highlight what he believed was the kind of perilous Irish trend discussed at the end of the previous chapter. In that case, he connected low taste with uncivilized life and peoples, "'tis with Taste, as with Custom, those who are used to a low one can

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<sup>335</sup> For European images of America see Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World: American Culture, the Formative Years* (New York, 1964); Hugh Honour, *The European Vision of America* (Cleveland, OH, 1975); and Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991).

<sup>336</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 14 July 1744, *Correspondence*, I, p. 31.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*, 5 February 1744/45, p. 41.

conceive nothing above it: Talk to an American on his savage Course of Life, and you will never be able to persuade him that such Living is wretched; the Means of Comparison not being within his Reach, he can have no Idea of the Difference.” Here Burke took a conventional American image as a land of savages in both the bloodthirsty sense and in the sense of lacking the social graces, and holds that image as a mirror up to his Dublin audience. Elevated taste and moral sophistication were not to be found in the natives of America, nor was it readily apparent in his Dublin. And as already discussed, Burke had his doubts that such tastes would be elevated in Ireland any time soon. He made the point in the sentence following the one just quoted that the irrational mind is closely related to the savage one. “Those will be always ready to fight against Reason, and Conviction,” he posited, “who lie under the Prejudice of ill ingrafted Principles.” Burke despaired that in the present condition of cultural debasement, Dublin “will never suffer good Taste to make any Advances among us....”<sup>338</sup> Two years before leaving his life in Ireland for good, Burke was already using America in a way consistent with his understanding of the power of the sublime to shape affections and in a way consistent with how he would come to view America as a proxy for contemporary Ireland, and, eventually, of Europe.

After leaving Dublin for London, Burke took term at the Middle Temple. These years followed upon two unsettled years spent waging pamphlet wars in Dublin between the completion of studies at Trinity and his arrival at the Temple and would be passed in relative obscurity: perhaps intentionally on his part, as a result of the trouble his very public engagement in Dublin’s literary and political culture had gotten him into with his father. Burke may have left to study law, but as would become clear, he intended still to be a writer.

Burke spent five or six years at the Middle Temple (1750-1755).<sup>339</sup> He was admitted on 23 April, 1747 and noted to be the “second son of Richard B. of the city of Dublin—one of H.M. attorneys in the Court of Exchequer, Ireland.”<sup>340</sup> He did not,

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<sup>338</sup> *The Reformer*, number 2, Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, 1747-48, *WS*, I, p. 73. His purposes here being clear, Burke chose to highlight the “savage” image held by many early modern Europeans, as opposed to the “classicized” version of that image held by many European thinkers schooled in the classical tradition.

<sup>339</sup> For a more detailed overview of the circumstances and environment surrounding Burke’s tenure at the Middle Temple see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 66-73.

<sup>340</sup> According to the *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple from the Fifteenth Century to 1944*, Volume I, compiled by Sir Henry F. MacGeagh and H.A.C. Sturges (London, 1949), pp. 337ff.

however, take his position until May of 1750, when William Burke, “son of John B., of The Middle Temple, London, gent.,” was admitted on 26 May, 1750.<sup>341</sup> Edmund did not intend to pursue law as a profession and never stood for the bar. He read voraciously and left with William Burke after his kinsman was called to the bar on 28 November, 1755. His time at Middle Temple was to be period of transition, and, importantly, of rounding out his education by adding a lasting element to his brand of Enlightened religious humanism: a love for and mastery of the history and philosophy of law. Arthur L. Woehl, in a doctoral dissertation on “Burke’s Reading,” contended that, “Burke evidently ransacked legal and historical documents of all kinds, including the Journals of the Lords of Commons, the Rolls and Laws of Parliament, State Trials, Statutes of Jeofails, Woodfall’s Parliamentary Debates, the legal decisions of Chief-Barons and Justices Hardwicke, Willes, Parker Raymond, Vaughan, Holt, Lee, Mansfield, and Wilmot.”<sup>342</sup> Beyond reading the great jurists, he also delved deeply into the digests of common law. His tenure at the Middle Temple, thus, served to extend Burke’s intellectual horizons and historical inclinations. His immersion in the philosophy of law, the common law tradition, the moral natural law school, and the history of constitutions—particularly British constitutionalism—was to pay dividends throughout the rest of his career. As such, it was a crucial period in his maturation. It was likely during these years that Burke deepened his habit of drawing out principle from circumstance. And he would come to admire and share the colonial British Americans’ passion for the law.<sup>343</sup> Burke might have been a reluctant law student, but subsequent to his studies he carried with enthusiasm this spirit of broad legal learning.

Burke, then, never had a taste for the legal profession itself, and was a frequent and passionate critique of the narrowness of legal education. He left the Middle Temple without being called to the bar so that he could pursue, against the strong advice of his father, a career in humane letters and journalism. What details one can make of this period of Burke’s life can be inferred from his later writings, the known curriculum of the Temple, and the recorded experiences of those who kept term contemporaneously with Burke—some of whom were Americans and would come to be leading figures in the American colonial rebellion of the 1760s and 1770s. Indeed, while in attendance, Burke

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> Arthur L. Woehl, “Burke’s Reading,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1928, p. 142.

<sup>343</sup> This is considered in chapter six of this thesis.

would have met some of the leading young colonial British Americans then studying with him at the Middle Temple.<sup>344</sup> It is striking the names of future colonial and revolutionary American leaders appearing on the Middle Temple's rolls during the years Burke was in residence included the likes of William Franklin, John Dickinson, Thomson Mason, Charles Carroll, and John Rutledge. So far the historical record is silent on any meeting between Burke and William Franklin (1731-1813), the son of Benjamin, later colonial governor and loyalist;<sup>345</sup> John Dickinson (1732-1808), himself to be a conservative reformer and one-day reluctant signer of the Declaration of Independence<sup>346</sup>; Thomson Mason (1725-1792), the brother of the Virginia patriot George Mason<sup>347</sup>; Charles Carroll (1723-1783), to be known as "the barrister" to distinguish him from his cousin, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration, with the same name<sup>348</sup>; or John Rutledge (1739-1800), South Carolina Patriot and future signer of the Declaration.<sup>349</sup> Burke did, however, know of William's famous father by the late 1750s as he included an excerpt from Benjamin's 1756 essay on population in the first volume of the *Annual Register* (1758), and Benjamin was present at Burke's first series of speeches upon being seated in Parliament

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<sup>344</sup> A representative list of such American attendees would have included: William Drayton, eldest son of Thomas D. of South Carolina, esq. (admitted 10-6-1750 and called to the bar 13 June, 1755); Henry Churchill, third son of Armstead C. of Virginia, esq. (admitted 10-9-1750 and called 24 May, 1754); William Franklin, son and heir of Benjamin F. of Philadelphia, America (admitted 11-2-1750-51 and called 10 November, 1758); Thomson Mason, third son of George M. of Virginia, esq. (admitted 14-8-1751 and called 22-11-1754); Charles Carroll, eldest son of Charles C. of the city of Anapolis, Maryland, America, M.D. (admitted 19-10-1751 and called 22 November, 1754); John Laurence Aikenhead, only son of William A., of the island of Jamaica in America, esq. (admitted 8-5-1752 and called 24 November, 1758); Thomas Bridgewater, eldest son of Edward B. of the island of Nevis in America, gent. (admitted 25-10-1752 and called 26 November, 1756); Robert Goldsborough, eldest son of Charles G., of Dorset, Maryland, esq. (admitted 12, 1752 and called 8 February, 1757); John Blair, eldest son of John B., of the county of York, Virginia, America, esq. (admitted 2-6-1753 and called 20 May, 1757); John Dickinson, second son of Samuel D., of Delaware, Kent, Pennsylvania, America, esq. (admitted 21-12-1753 and called 8 February, 1757); John Rutledge, son and heir of John R. of Charlestown, South Carolina, America, esq. (admitted 11-10-1754 and called 9 February, 1760); along with an admittance list totaling 49 individuals from 1750-1757. According to the *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple from the Fifteenth Century to 1944*, Volume 1, pp. 337-355.

<sup>345</sup> See Sheila L. Skemp, *William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>346</sup> See Milton E. Flower, *John Dickinson: Conservative Revolutionary* (Charlottesville, VA, 1983).

<sup>347</sup> See Jeff Broadwater, *George Mason: Forgotten Founder* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

<sup>348</sup> See Ronald Hoffman, *Princes of Ireland, Planters of Maryland: A Carroll Saga, 1500-1782* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000).

<sup>349</sup> See James Haw, *John and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina* (Athens, GA, 1997).



at the time of the Stamp Act disturbances.<sup>350</sup> And Burke also apparently met and had to his house for dinner Charles Carroll of Carrollton around this same time.<sup>351</sup>

The presence of such persons and the distinguished colonial families they represented would become salient in the compilation and writing of the *Settlements* as the authors cite conversations with traders and travelers as a source of their information, judgments, and conclusions.<sup>352</sup> And it was during this period of more than five years in the mid-1750s and early 1760s that Burke appears to have seriously considered emigration to the American colonies. At this time Burke was aspiring to become a writer, and, significantly, his first historical work, the *Settlements*, was an extended study of the Spanish, French, and English New World.

After leaving the Middle Temple, Burke's first recorded intention was emigration to America for an unspecified colonial post. In Burke's only letter surviving from September 1752 to August 1757, a fragment of which is torn away, he is reassuring his father that he will not pursue the position in the face of strong family opposition. "I am, I own Surprized, and very much concernd that this proposal should prove any Cause either of grief or anger to you.... When I informed you of my design it was not to declare any determined Resolution which I had taken but to desire your opinion on an affair which I believd it adviseable for me to engage in. This affair seemd to me neither to be wrong in itself nor unattended with a reasonable prospect of Success."<sup>353</sup> Burke forfeited his desire to pursue the "vacant" post in question: "I shall be Ready to yield to [your Judgment] always and to go to Ireland when you think proper and the End for which you desire I should go can be answered...."<sup>354</sup> In his influential early nineteenth-century life of Burke, James Prior asserted that Edmund's father objected to this plan, effectively checking his

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<sup>350</sup> In a 1766 letter from London informing friends in Philadelphia of the repeal of the Stamp Act, Benjamin Franklin includes "Mr. Burke" on a list of America's "firm friends in the House of Commons. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 16, p. 120.

<sup>351</sup> See Charles Constantine Pise, *Oration in the Honour of the Late Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Delivered before the Philodemic Society of Georgetown College* (Georgetown, 1832). Pise was a Jesuit and Chaplain to the United States Senate. He was a close friend, confidant, and caretaker of Carroll in the Patriot's later years. In the funeral oration, p. 11, Pise recalled the following: "The epoch in which Mr. Carroll went to London, was one of the brightest in the history of modern Europe.... Burke was in his zenith; and I remember to have heard Mr. Carroll say, that he had been invited by that great orator to dine *en famille*."

<sup>352</sup> *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, preface.

<sup>353</sup> Burke to Richard Burke, his father, 11 March 1755, *Correspondence*, I, p. 119.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

son's American hopes.<sup>355</sup> That is plausible, for as noted in the previous chapter, Burke had a difficult relationship with his father, who opposed his son's various career fancies with the force of the family purse—excepting of course the legal profession. Though the Burkes as a collective unit—Edmund, William, and Richard—all had the same goal of emigration to America during this time. While Edmund never made it there, his kin did. In 1759, for instance, William secured a post with the British administration in Guadeloupe; while in 1763, Burke's brother Richard was appointed collector of customs in Grenada.<sup>356</sup>

The idea of America and the possibilities it offered held a high place in Burke's mind during the mid- and late-1750s. For when we pick up his extant correspondence two years later, in 1757, he is still thinking about America and the prospect it might hold for him. 1757 was an eventful year in Burke's life. In March he married the former Jane Nugent, daughter of his physician friend Dr. Christopher Nugent. On April 1 Dodsley published his two-volume collaborative (with William Burke) survey, *An Account of the European Settlements in America*. On 21 April of that same year Dodsley published his landmark treatise on aesthetics, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke also began to draft two significant but unpublished historical works during this year, the "Fragment" *An Essay towards an History of the Laws of England* and the more substantial *Essay towards an Abridgement of the English* (which the Dodsley brothers had contracted with him to write on 25 February 1757). Finally, he revised and published on 16 December 1757 a second edition of his satirical application of Bolingbroke's rationalist philosophy and "natural religion" to the secular political realm, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (first published in May of the preceding year). In both the *Vindication* and the *Enquiry*, Burke's deep suspicion of the ability of human reason alone to account satisfactorily for all the mysteries of people and nations was evident.

It was during the high tide of this feverish literary output in which Burke, on 10 August 1757, wrote to his boyhood friend and lifelong correspondent Richard Shackleton that it was his intention to redirect his "manner of Life, checquered with various

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<sup>355</sup> See James Prior, *Life of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, Fifth Edition* (London, 1882) pp.41-53.

<sup>356</sup> Both William and Richard were accused of using their posts for dubious personal gain. See Dixon Wecter's study on this matter, *Edmund Burke and His Kinsmen: A Study of the Statesman's Financial Integrity and Private Relationships* (Boulder, CO, 1939).

designs...and shortly please God, to be in America.”<sup>357</sup> Burke’s objective is verified in a letter from his friend and former roommate at Trinity, William Dennis, to Richard Shackleton five days earlier, in which the former observes: “[Burke]...tells me his purpose for America holds when the present Troubles admit him.”<sup>358</sup> While one cannot say with certainty what Burke’s “designs” were regarding America, it is likely that a land grant was promised him. According to his friend Michael Kearney, Burke was “not long after his arrival in London patronized by Earl Granville, & if I recollect rightly, had an offer of land in Carolina from him.” This carries some authority as William Dennis, in a letter to Shackleton asserts that Burke is “well known to Lord Granville”: better known at the time by the title Viscount Carteret (1690-1763).<sup>359</sup> Carteret had the reputation of being one of the great orators of his age and was also a classical scholar—a perfect combination for a young man of Burke’s background and talents. This intriguing possibility for Burke related by Dennis finds some corroboration in the person of Arthur Dobbs (1689-1765). While a member of the Irish Parliament, in 1733 Dobbs was granted by Sir Robert Walpole 200,000 acres in North Carolina. Prior to that, Walpole appointed him Surveyor General of Ireland and in 1729 he published an economic study of the condition of Ireland. Dobbs co-founded the Royal Dublin Society for agricultural studies and became a passionate advocate for the existence of a Northwest Passage to India. He organized two expeditions to discover the passage and wrote a work on Hudson Bay.

As will be noted below, one of the sources used in compiling the *Settlements* was Dobbs’s *An Account of the Counties Adjoining to Hudson’s Bay* (1744). Dobbs was very energetic about encouraging Irishmen to settle in Carolina, and was himself elected as colonial governor in 1753, after having led the opposition in Britain to the governorship of Gabriel Johnston (1699-1752). He moved there to assume his role as colonial governor, a post he held from 1754-1764. Burke was at Trinity College when Dobbs was promoting land opportunity in Carolina to young Irishmen, and a decade later he was using Dobbs’s history of Hudson Bay in writing the *Settlements* at the very time Dobbs became governor of North Carolina.

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<sup>357</sup> Burke to Shackleton, *Correspondence*, I, 10 August 1757, p.123.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, note 2.

<sup>359</sup> Michael Kearney to Edmond Malone, 12 January 1799, Bodleian Collection (Oxford), Malone Manuscripts, 39, fo. 24, quoted in F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, I, p. 126. William Dennis to Richard Shackleton, August 5 1758, *Correspondence*, I, p. 124, n. 5.

Beyond that, Dobbs was on “intimate terms” with Carteret, who was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland while Dobbs served in the Irish parliament. Dobbs worked closely with Carteret in London on matters related to the settlement and the possibility of laying open its trade, as well as on issues related to the North Carolina colony of which they both had a landed interest. Both Carteret and Dobbs were at various times on friendly terms with leading thinkers such as Swift (the house Dobbs grew up in was next door to Swift’s) and the physician and natural philosopher, Thomas Molyneux (1661-1733), as well as politicians such as Chesterfield and Walpole. Entry into a world of such literary-political connections was Burke’s ambition.<sup>360</sup>

What were the “present Troubles” that prohibited Burke from accepting this offer and abandoning for a second time his intention of going to America? Financial difficulty may have played a part. Burke’s father had cut off his monetary subvention when his son decided against the Bar. Burke described himself in desperate terms, “a runaway son from his father,” at this time.<sup>361</sup> And considering Richard Burke’s fierce opposition to his son’s American plans in 1755 it is unlikely that he softened to the idea in the ensuing two years. There is the additional fact that Burke married in 1757, and though we do not have any evidence of his new wife’s opinion of the matter, it would be understandable if she preferred to stay in England, close to her friends and family (especially her father, Dr. Christopher Nugent, who was “guide, philosopher, and friend”—and medical doctor—to Edmund and an integral part of Burke’s family circle<sup>362</sup>). However, the date of Burke’s letter to Shackleton declaring his American intention is six months after his marriage to Jane Nugent, so it is likely they had discussed the idea and she had given at least preliminary approval.

However, those “present troubles” mentioned by William Dennis in 1757 were just as likely the onset of the Seven Years War (or the French and Indian War in America). The commencement of this international struggle very likely would have forced Burke to put on hold any plans for an American migration. Carteret, for his part, was advanced in years and would be dead by the War’s end, and Arthur Dobbs would be only one year away from retiring his post three months away from death. Carteret’s

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<sup>360</sup> For material in this paragraph related to Dobbs, Carteret, et al., see Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire, 1689-1765* (London, 1958), especially pages 44-81.

<sup>361</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 121.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, see “Epistle to Dr. Nugent,” pp. 116-117.

(maybe along with Dobbs?) purported offer of land to Burke in the Carolinas may not have survived much beyond 1757. And, significantly, the course of Burke's life, so uncertain in 1757, was better fixed by the end of the Seven Year's War, making it more difficult for him to extricate himself from his mounting journalistic and political obligations to pursue an American adventure. But in spite of all this, the allure of the Americas remained a flame flickering in the recesses of Burke's mind. Evidence exists as late as 1761, in a letter to his Irish friend and confidant Charles O'Hara, that Burke was not completely beyond the dream of emigrating to the American colonies: "When you look at the Atlantick ocean do you think of America? In our old fabulous History I think I have read that the Prophet Moses advised the antient Scots to go as far Westward as possible; is this good advice to their posterity?"<sup>363</sup> This letter was penned before Burke was scheduled to leave London for Dublin and a tour of duty as assistant to the Gerard Hamilton, the new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland's chief secretary. It was also at this time that the revisions and new preface were completed for the third edition of the *Settlements* (1761). Since in April of 1761 an order exists recommending that William continue as Secretary and Register of Guadeloupe,<sup>364</sup> it is likely that Edmund handled the revisions and penned the preface. Although he was leaving for Ireland, he still harbored thoughts of America. Realistically, he must have known that any such American opportunity had passed and it would be London where his fortune would be won or lost. But this fact oftentimes makes such a dream all the more alluring. If we take seriously Burke's intention of going to America it becomes a moment of significance, one that demands greater critical attention. In Burke's writing about America, was there lurking someone with "The American Dream" counted among the things he wanted to do but never did? In this sense, a personal sympathy for America may have lingered in Burke and laid behind his famous "friendship" for its cause—so long as there was hope for it to remain in the imperial fold. More importantly for our purposes, it suggests that the image of America that emerged in his pre-parliamentary writings was also a more personal one. The tools he would use to uncover the face of America being the very ones he would use to uncover the hidden monuments of Ireland.

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<sup>363</sup> Burke to Charles O'Hara, 10 July 1761, *Correspondence*, I, p. 141.

<sup>364</sup> See Dixon Wecter, "Edmund Burke and His Kinsman," p. 19n83.



Those instruments as well as his Irish experience were put to use in producing *The Account of the European Settlements in America*. As mentioned in the Introduction, it was first published in 1757 and went through six editions in Burke's lifetime (the sixth, and last, in 1777).<sup>365</sup> The opening lines of the *Settlements* stated the immediate reason for its publication: "The affairs of America have lately engaged a great deal of public attention."<sup>366</sup> The *Settlements* thus sought to tap into a growing interest in colonial matters occasioned by the Seven Years War.<sup>367</sup>

Five of the seven sections that comprised the *Settlements* were concerned with the history of America's discovery, the non-British efforts at colonization, and the nature of the native American inhabitants. The last two sections dealt with the English attempts at securing colonial settlements, first in the West Indies and then on the continent of North America. In succession, then, the *Settlements* surveyed the Spanish contribution to colonization efforts, which was described as "romantic courage mixed with...a thirst for gold"; the French contribution, characterized as "a systematic policy of tempering and guiding an active industry"; and the British role, portrayed as initiatives meant to "display the effects of liberty."<sup>368</sup> Finally, the tissue that connected the various sections of the work was an investigation into the "genius and temper" of the Americans themselves, that is of their "manners," as well as the physical/natural environment of the New World and an interest in everything related to trade and commerce.<sup>369</sup> In short, "to give a general idea of America" and to "engage" or "reward" the reader seeking instruction.<sup>370</sup> In this aspect, too, it encouraged Edmund's political and theoretical interest in imperial relations and the nature of empire—particularly his later view that manners and trade constitute peoples and cement empire. Edmund made known to William Robertson that his own interest in the New World had largely to do with the history and theory of commerce, as he applauded the Scottish historian for throwing "quite a new light" on both the state of commerce in Spanish America at the time of its settlement and the economic impact of the trans-Atlantic flow of trade in the New World and in Europe.<sup>371</sup> Produced as it was at

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<sup>365</sup> William B. Todd, *A Bibliography of Edmund Burke*, pp. 28-33.

<sup>366</sup> *Settlements*, I, preface, p. i.

<sup>367</sup> The Seven Years War (or The French and Indian War in North America) began its American phase two years earlier, in 1755, while the European theatre opened in 1756.

<sup>368</sup> *Settlements*, Part VI, p. 201.

<sup>369</sup> *Settlements*, Preface, p. vii.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 194, preface.

<sup>371</sup> Burke to Robertson, 9 June 1777, *Correspondence*, III, p. 351.

the outset of the Seven Years War, the *Settlements* was intended to provide a brief advocating free trade and an increase of commercial interaction with the colonies for the benefit of Britain as well as their North American colonies.

## II.

Burke's method in researching and writing the *Settlements* is pertinent to determining his involvement in the text. Thomas Macaulay captured Burke's powers of research and synthesis (with regards to India):

He had studied the history, the laws, and the usages of the East with an industry, such as is seldom found united to so much genius and so much sensibility. Others have perhaps been equally laborious, and have collected an equal mass of materials. But the manner in which Burke brought his higher powers of intellect to work on statements of facts, and on tables of figures, was peculiar to himself.<sup>372</sup>

That "peculiar" "genius" was also applied with "much sensibility" to the compilation of the *Settlements* and to his study of American history, laws, mores, and policies in the ensuing years. The reader of the *Settlements* was instructed and entertained by "Character" studies of a wide range of historical actors in America, from Europeans like Columbus and Cortés to native Americans such as Moctezuma and Guatimozín; by accounts of unusual (to Europeans) native American rituals and tactics in warfare; by harrowing accounts of slaughter and torture perpetrated by European and native alike; by considerations of flora and fauna, soil, climate, and air quality; by summaries of commercial practices; by political intrigues in European capitals and New World settlements; by differences of religion throughout the colonies and between native Americans; and by analysis of natural science employed as part of the mechanical or technological aspects of the European conquest of the Americas.

Much of the information gathered for such a sprawling survey was taken from early eighteenth-century studies by scholar-adventurers. Indeed, there was a proliferation of these kinds of works during that time, an interest in travel literature being characteristic of the Enlightenment-era. "Travel literature and assessments of travel literature," argued P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, "are some of the most trenchant

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<sup>372</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems*, Volume II, "Warren Hastings," (Chicago, 1888), p. 632.

statements of the Enlightenment's view of man."<sup>373</sup> Along these lines, Boswell recounted how he once asked Burke about books he would like to have in his library. Beyond a good library and the writings of Shakespeare and the old English authors, "He would have a complete library of voyages and travels."<sup>374</sup> Burke's early historical work, especially his account of New World settlements, was an important source for situating him and his "Enlightenment."<sup>375</sup> He shared with "enlightened" members of his age an awareness of and appreciation for a widening world. Burke and his "cousin" collaborator worked from a number of important early sources to produce an original chronicle of New World conquests. Recalling Burke's letter to William Robertson in which he said he had always had an interest in tracing the outlines of humanity's great map, the *Settlements* was meant to be a contribution to the Enlightenment-era interest in charting that history through an investigation and survey of heretofore unknown peoples and lands. It was in many ways a compilation of source material, with the reoccurring general philosophical insight and intervention of narrative compact or mini-histories of events or lives: what was given only being "so much of the history of each country as may serve to shew, when and upon what principles it was planted, to enable the reader the better to judge of its present condition. These accounts are very short....If I could not well upon any subject, I have endeavored always to write concisely."<sup>376</sup> As will be discussed below, these occasions are what mark the work as a distinctively Edmund Burke production. Burke the judicious editor, incisive observer, devourer of current learning in a variety of areas, and keen student of human nature, are all on display in this early production in a way that anticipated the kind of work he would produce in a different format as founding editor and chief compiler/writer of *The Annual Register* one year later.

Evidencing an important characteristic of Edmund's approach to writing, the *Settlements* was an interdisciplinary work, drawing on historical studies and records, as well as on works of geography, ethnography, and comparative anthropology, for its substantive analysis. Most prominent among the principal sources he used were:

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<sup>373</sup> Marshall & Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in an Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>374</sup> Boswell, *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle*, volume XVII, p. 51.

<sup>375</sup> Significantly, 8% of the 946 books catalogued in Burke's library in 1813 were classified in the category of "Geography and Exploration," the fifth highest category behind History and Biography, Classical Literature, Modern Literature, and Politics and Law. Source: Jean-Yves Michel Le Saux, "Edmund Burke's Private Library," p. 473.

<sup>376</sup> *Settlements*, preface.

*Navigentum atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, by John Harris (1666-1719), first published in 1705, expanded and republished in 1744; *Natural History of Jamaica*, by Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), published in 1707 and 1725; *Mœurs des Sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* and *Histoire des découvertes et des conquêtes des Portugais dans le Nouveau-Monde*, by Joseph-François Lafitau, S.J. (1681-1746), and published in 1724 and 1733 respectively; *The Theory and Practice of Commerce and Maritime Affairs*, by Geronimo de Uztariz y Hermiaga (1670- 1732), translated in two volumes and published in 1751; *A Voyage around the World*, by George (Lord) Anson (1697-1762), published in 1748; *Relation of the Voyage to the South Sea, Along the Coast of Chile and Perou, Made During the Years 1712, 1713, and 1714*, (and also including an account of the settlement of the Jesuits in Paraguay), by Amédée-François Frézier (1682-1773), translated and published 1718; the previously mentioned *Account of the Counties Adjoining to Hudson's Bay*, by Arthur Dobbs, published in 1744; *The History of the Five Indian Nations* by Cadwallader Colden (1688-1776), published originally, New York, 1727, and in an enlarged edition, London, 1747; *Relation abrégée d'un voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Amerique Meridionale*, by Charles Marie de la Condamine (1701-1774), translated and published 1745-1747; *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, by Mark Catesby (1683-1749) published between 1731-1743; *Summary...of the British Settlements in North America*, by William Douglass (1691-1752), published 1749-1752; *The History of the Puritans; or Protestant Nonconformists; from the Reformation in 1517 to the Revolution in 1688*, by Daniel Neale (1678-1743), published in 1754; in the context of his discussion of Paraguay it is likely he relied upon *Histoire de Paraguay* by Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, S.J. (1682-1761), published in 1756<sup>377</sup>; *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (1665-present); *The London Gazette* (1665-present) and a range of newspapers in general; collections of unacknowledged travel accounts; collections of colonial laws; poems; and other miscellaneous publications. Significantly, many of these books were catalogued in Burke's library.<sup>378</sup>

<sup>377</sup> In the material Burke used to draft his *Speech on the Use of Indians* (1778) he referred to "Lafitau—Charlevoix—Governor Colden" as "authors of the first Magnitude and Credit." *WS*, III, p. 366.

<sup>378</sup> Including Dobbs, Anson, Harris, Douglas, Colden, Lafitau, Utariz, and Neale, as well as numerous additional travel accounts and histories related to America but not mentioned directly in the *Settlements*. For example, a recent Burke student surveyed the contents of Burke's library and contended that, "In writing the *Settlements*, the Burkes could rely on a budding literature in the field of economics and colonial

The editor of Burke's modern *Works and Speeches*, Paul Langford, notes that in his *Speech on the Use of Indians* (1777), Burke "appears to have taken some trouble to study the history of the Indians." However, Langford does not mention that he did that research and formed his opinions of the "use" of Indians by white Europeans while writing the *Settlements*.<sup>379</sup> Significantly, Langford proceeds to cite several of the texts Burke used in working on the *Settlements*, and inadvertently identifies two other authors that Burke most likely worked with when researching and writing the text: the French explorer and Catholic priest, Louis Hennepin (1640-1700), probably his *Description de la Louisiane* (1683), and the primitivist Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron de Lahontan (1666-1713), and his popular travel account, *Nouveaux voyages dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (1703).<sup>380</sup> It is important to note that Burke was in many instances operating on the cutting edge of scholarship during that time. For instance, he was among the very earliest English-speaking writers to engage the aforementioned works of the soon-to-be influential naturalist/ethnographer, Joseph Lafitau. In the *Settlements*, Burke wrote of "the learned Lafitau" and quoted at length from what Burke stated was "a work which deserves to be read amongst us much more than I find it is."<sup>381</sup> Burke did so a decade before his contemporaries and later acquaintances, Adam Ferguson (1723-1816)—who is often credited with bringing Lafitau into vogue—did so in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), and John Millar (1735-1801) did in *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771). Burke would later favorably review Ferguson's *Essay* in the *Annual Register*.<sup>382</sup>

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trade. Burke's library contains pre-1757 works on the subject, and he probably derived his positive appreciation of the French colonial administration from Henri de Boulainvilliers's *Etat de la France* (which he owned in a 1752 edition) as well as from Malachy Postlethwayt's *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (1750). . . . See Le Saux's "Edmund Burke's Private Library," pp. 449-467, and pp. 192, 185.

<sup>379</sup> See, *WS*, III, p. 355n1. Given his use of so many sources by Catholic clergy, Burke may well have made use in the *Settlements* of the influential account of North American discovery, *Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France* (*Jesuit Relations*), which multiple volumes were produced from 1632-1673 and which did so much to bring into vogue North American travel accounts in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. As mentioned in a chapter one note, the presence of many French Catholic sources for Burke's America make it likely that his Irish family ties and the traffic between southwest Ireland and France during his lifetime would have first familiarized him with this literature.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.* For biographic overviews of these two authors and their widely-read, but often inaccurate and exaggerated, works, see the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

<sup>381</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 168; 184-185.

<sup>382</sup> See Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed., Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, 1995), p. xxi; and Bruce P. Lenman, "'From Savage to Scot' via the French and the Spaniards: Principal Robertson's Spanish Sources," in Stewart J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 198-199. For Burke's review of and extracts from that work see, *Annual Register*, 1767, pp. 307-316, in which he wrote: "Mr. Ferguson has given us almost everything...which has already been advanced



The *Settlements* was drafted in or near Wales, most likely in the summer of 1756 when Edmund was twenty-six years old.<sup>383</sup> Bringing the materials they needed, the Burkes set upon a research and writing plan, dividing the labor according to their particular strengths and skills. The work was a compilation, abridgement, and redaction of several sources. The preface to the work stated as much: “to acquire a proper knowledge of the history of the events in America an idea of its present state, and a competent judgment of its trade, a great deal of reading has been found requisite...reading on many parts of this subject is dry and disgusting...some are loaded with a lumber of matter that can interest very few...others obscure the truth in many particulars, to gratify the low prejudices of parties, and, I may say, of nations.”<sup>384</sup>

William Burke did most of the copying and paraphrasing. After reading and sorting through the “lumber” of unnecessary matter, William began organizing and paraphrasing it. Edmund Burke then took the work, “revised” it, as he admitted to Boswell, added his own material and contributed what critical and incisive judgment it possesses, a gloss aimed at identifying fundamental principles and uncovering historical “truth”: “It is only by comparing the printed accounts with one another, and those with the best private information, and correcting all by authentic matter of record, that one can discover the truth; and this has been a matter of some difficulty.”<sup>385</sup> It was a system that

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by others,...in such a light as to make it almost entirely his own, which would alone be sufficient to entitle him to the praise of every deep and subtle investigator of the human mind. (p. 308)” Given his work in the *Settlements*, Burke might have included himself among such “investigators.”

<sup>383</sup> There is much scholarly guesswork as to when the *Settlements* actually was written. Malone told Boswell it was written in Wales. See *Letters of James Boswell to Rev. W. J. Temple*, p. 264. Charles Weston sites Chauncey B. Tinker’s contention that the work was written in 1752, but disagrees and states that “it would appear from hostile statements about the French in the book that it was written after large-scale fighting had broken out in America between the English and French in 1754, but one cannot be sure of the year because there had been rivalry and sharp skirmishes there since 1749.” See Weston... p. 12. William Todd dates the writing of the work to 1751, which is unlikely and stated without support. See Todd, *A Bibliography of Edmund Burke*, p. 28n. Fuchs, however, follows Todd and refers to a 1797 reference the *Annual Register* for support. See Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self*, p. 86n1. Lock argues for the 1756 date from internal evidences such as references to the present war and the assertion by the Burkes in the section on Georgia that the work was written twenty-four years from that colony’s settlement in 1732. See F. P. Lock, p. 129n. Dixon Wecter argues, too, that “One may take the word of the scrupulous Malone...,” “The Missing Years,” p.1120. Weston and Lock, the testimony of Malone and the internal evidence, as well as the fact that Burke had announced in 1755 in a letter to his father (well documented in the next chapter) a strong desire to leave for America, are the basis for my own view that 1756 is the likely date when at least the bulk of work was written. Burke would have then had the time, opportunity, and professional and personal interest in tackling such a project. However, such wide-ranging disagreements over the dating of the *Settlements* highlight, in Lock’s words, “how little the *Account* has been read.” *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> *Settlements*, Preface.

<sup>385</sup> *Settlements*, Preface.

the young Burkes apparently had grown comfortable with; evidenced, for example, by William's presence in Edmund's youthful "notebook" as a principal compiler, much of the notebook being copied in William's hand (and bearing a label on the cover "Found among Mr Wm Burke's Papers by W Cupage").<sup>386</sup> Furthermore, it also was a system very similar to the one Edmund developed with his co-writers as editor and principal writer of his college paper, *The Reformer*.

William Burke's own writing is of evidentiary value in determining what parts of the *Settlements* can reasonably be ascribed to William and which to Edmund. So, too, is Edmund's recorded opinion of William's character and mind, especially their respective strengths and weakness. Beyond the *Settlements*, the other writings attributed to William are two pamphlets: *Remarks on the Letter Addressed to Two Great Men* (1760) and *An Examination of the Commercial Principles of the Late Negotiation Between Great Britain and France* (1761). Some of William's youthful verse is included in Edmund's youthful "notebook." Beyond that, other writings attributed to him are inconclusive or are in large part Edmund's.<sup>387</sup> The writings are straightforward and intelligent but conventional. They contain little of Edmund's rhetorical strengths and literary style—his power of synthesis and generalization, his ability to draw universalist insights from particulars, his poetic and historical sensibility, or his keen and sympathetic insight into the human condition. In substance and argument they also are the product of a narrowly focused mind, one in which economic and power relations are the determining factor.

Edmund and William met when the former was twenty-one and the latter twenty. Close, intense, and loyal friendships were natural for Edmund, and William filled the gap left by his separation from Shackleton. William was devoted to his "cousin," and always deferred to Edmund's greater genius. When in 1765 Lord Verney offered William a seat in Parliament he promoted Edmund in his place (William secured a seat of his own the following year). He introduced Burke to Rockingham. And he is reported to have deferred courting Jane Nugent in favor of her future husband, Edmund. Whether in their literary productions, their political careers, or their personal lives, William followed and served the interests of Edmund.

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<sup>386</sup> Somerset, *A Notebook of Edmund Burke*, p. 3. In this view I accept Prior's contention that Will's role was "that of amanuensis," a view F. P. Lock in his modern biography basically shares with a good deal more detail and nuance.

<sup>387</sup> William Todd argued that Edmund had "a part" in the *Remarks* and the *Examination*, well as Lock, p. 127n.

Beyond his fidelity to Edmund, however, William could be dishonest and reckless, particularly in financial dealings.<sup>388</sup> And he did not share Burke's profound sense of sympathy nor did he possess the largeness of Burke's spirit and tolerant mind. Burke, as will be shown in later chapters, opposed the African slave trade as it developed in the New World and had, for his age, a magnanimous understanding of native American and African negro persons and their less than enlightened treatment at the hands of white European settlers. William's prejudices in this regard were more negatively conventional, once telling Edmund's brother, Richard, that regarding Burke's deep conviction for the plight of Tanjore and its inhabitants, he could not "for the soul of me" feel as Edmund did toward "the black primates."<sup>389</sup> Indeed, the writing in the *Settlements* was marked by the same concern for the human concerns and conditions of the inhabitants as were his later writings on India. What Edmund declared so forcefully in a 1786 letter to Mary Palmer about his feelings toward native peoples in India experiencing brutal injustice at the hands of a conquering minority could have been just as fairly stated about the Amerindians and African slaves (and by extension the native Irish) in the 1750s: "I have no party in this business, my dear Miss Palmer, but among a set of people, who have none of your Lilies and Roses in their face; but who are the images of the Great Pattern as well as you and I. I know what I am doing; whether the white people like it or not."<sup>390</sup>

On many occasions Edmund referred to William as "my kinsman," thus acknowledging both his fondness for Will and their common Irish blood. John Bourke, a native of County Mayo and a London merchant and friend to the Burkes, provided testimony to their friendship: "[William] and Edmund have lived together from their early days, in a course of the most uninterrupted friendship, with the same affections, the same connexions and interests; as their union has been close, their separation must be grievous. I really pity the man going and the man left behind."<sup>391</sup> The personal and professional dimensions of their relationship were known to be inextricably and indistinguishably bound together.<sup>392</sup> They were friends, they were fellow travelers, they were colleagues, and they were collaborators. They knew each other's mind, and they

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<sup>388</sup> See Wecter, "Edmund Burke and His Kinsman."

<sup>389</sup> William to Richard Burke, Jr., 30 December 1785, quoted in *WS*, V, p. 11.

<sup>390</sup> Burke to Mary Palmer, 19 January 1786, *Correspondence*, V, p. 252.

<sup>391</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 1103-1104.

<sup>392</sup> See Edmund's and William's letters to the Duke of Portland in this regard: *Correspondence*, IV, pp. 273; 287.

knew each other's talents and deficiencies. This fact was demonstrated in a youthful prose sketch written by Edmund about William, who he cloaked under the pseudonym or character of "Phidippus." In it, Edmund affectionately noted William's strengths but also argued that his subject was impetuous and inconstant, his "judgemt" and "understanding" were "strong & Quick but it is not Steddy," and most material to William's ability to take the lead on composing a work such as the *Settlements*, Edmund stated he was unreliable "where attention, care, & power of comparing various & discordant matters, to reconcile them are required."<sup>393</sup>

### III.

The nature and degree of Edmund's written contribution to the *Settlements* remains to this day an unsettled question. While there is a range of direct and indirect evidence that connects Edmund to this important, but neglected, Burke work, many twentieth-century scholars have resisted pursuing the tantalizing trail Burke left behind of himself in this work. Significantly, though, within Burke Studies circles there is now openness to a fresh scholarly engagement with this text and other early Burke writings that has not until now existed. Hence, scholars are increasingly receptive to a more complete integration of the *Settlements* into the corpus of Burke's work. Such an endeavor is important for the light it sheds on Burke's historical method and mind at this early but pivotal juncture of his career. It is a task worthy, that is, for its own sake as much or more than for the implications of this early American work on his later political speeches. The student of Burke and/or eighteenth-century Atlantic history can usefully study this early work for a better understanding of Burke's pre-Parliamentary notions of conquest, colonization, and empire; for an early and comparative application of Enlightenment notions of commerce and liberty; for an early example of historical mindedness in journalism, contemporary history, and politics; and for what might be provocatively termed evidence of a "Jesuit Humanism" that can be detected in the way in which Burke's liberal use of Jesuit sources or sources about Jesuit activity in the New World helped to fashion a marked sympathy and toleration for native American "others" and English-speaking religious outsiders in South and North America.<sup>394</sup> No extensive consideration of this American aspect of

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<sup>393</sup> Edmund Burke, "Phidippus," post-1750, *WS*, I, p. 55.

<sup>394</sup> On the idea of a Jesuit humanism see Carl F. Starkloff, S.J., *Common Testimony: Ethnology and Theology in the Customs of Joseph Lafitau* (St Louis, MO, 2002), pp. 29-30: "As various historians have

Burke's mind has been undertaken. And yet when it comes to the *Settlements*, despite some hesitancy, few who wrote about Burke's life and thought in the last century could resist a speculation.

Burke himself invited such conjecture. In a 1776 diary entry, James Boswell (1740-1795) recorded a piece of a conversation he had on the matter with Edmund: "He [Burke] did not write 'European settlers (sic) in America.' He knows who did, but is upon honour to conceal it. 'I revised it,' he said, 'and do not say there is nothing in it of mine.'" <sup>395</sup> The date of entry, "1776," must be more than a coincidence. The American crisis was the great English and imperial concern of that historic year. Boswell's line of questioning would not have seemed odd to Burke or anyone else at the time, especially given the notoriety of Burke's American speeches in the preceding two years. Burke's guard, then, may have been a little down, letting slip to a friend a sliver of insight into the kind of secret he usually kept so well and so close. <sup>396</sup> No doubt Boswell had this tantalizing suggestion in mind when in another notable year, 1789, the Irish Shakespeare scholar, Edmond Malone (1741-1812), told him that Will Burke authored the *Settlements*. Boswell, just then reading the work—which he called "an admirable compend"—for the first time, had his doubts, and responded to Malone that, "it is everywhere evident that Burke himself contributed a great deal to it." <sup>397</sup> Boswell is thus our best testament to Edmund's direct and substantial involvement in the *Settlements*, basing as he does his contention in both the personal word of the "author" and internal textual evidence.

And, furthermore, another close friend, countryman, and correspondent of Burke's during that point in Burke's career most salient to this thesis, Charles O'Hara

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observed, one valuable endowment that the Jesuits carried with them to the New World was their extensive classical education, which enabled them to appreciate many native customs and to understand them, even when they inveighed against some of them. It is to their credit, especially to that of Lafitau, to have been able to recognize genuine humanistic values in cultures outside the elite cultural circles of Europe...." This perspective, as we will see in the chapters that follow this one, is shared by Edmund, if not, as will also be documented, by William, Burke. Starkloff does not mention in his study of Lafitau Burke's employment of his subject in the *Settlements*. But had he known of the connection he might have noticed in Burke an earlier writer who also recognized in Lafitau and Charlevoix authors of deeply humanistic tendencies. Importantly in this regard, his analysis in the *Settlements* suggests that he digested Lafitau and Charlevoix pretty much whole; whereas he must have been more cautious with Lahonton, for example, whose exaggerated primitivism with regard to the Amerindians was not reflected in its pages.

<sup>395</sup> Boswell *Papers*, XI, pp. 268-269. Also in *Letters of James Boswell to Rev. W. J. Temple*, ed. By Thomas Seacombe (London, 1908), p. 195; and then in Boswell, *Letters*, edited by C. B. Tinker (Oxford, 1924), II, pp. 285, 387.

<sup>396</sup> Anonymity was prized by Burke in each of his early writings, his involvement in the *Annual Register* being the most famous example as it was a participation he never acknowledged. This fact makes his sly reference to Boswell all the more important, and suggestive.

<sup>397</sup> Boswell, *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle*, volume XI, p. 264.



(1715-1776), provides a corresponding contemporary view of the *Settlements* to Boswell's. In a letter to Burke in January, 1765, he recorded the following: "I have done much farm work and have read plentifully. I brought down with other things the European Settlements in America. 'Tis not equally good; but yet such as it is, few men could write it."<sup>398</sup> Why would O'Hara have brought the *Settlements* with him to read in 1765? The volatile disruption in America associated with the passing of the Stamp Act was one good reason. But why tell Burke? Burke had been in Ireland in 1761 and again for the Irish Parliamentary session of 1763-1764, serving as secretary to William Gerard Hamilton (1729-1796), who in turn was the Chief Secretary to the Earl of Halifax, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. O'Hara was a longtime member of the Irish Parliament, was a generation older than Burke, and was unique among Burke correspondents for the mutual warmth and informality that characterized their exchange of letters. The implication of this letter is that O'Hara knew Burke wrote much of it, and detected his young friend's genius and gift for penetrating to the essential character of peoples and policies in its pages. O'Hara's note suggests that Burke may well have recommended the *Settlements* to him for reading in 1764 while he was in Ireland just months earlier for the Parliamentary session as a good way for O'Hara to come up to speed on the character of the Americans and their constitutional zeal to "keep alive the spirit of liberty."<sup>399</sup> In that light O'Hara's letter reads like a follow-up to a friend confirming that he had taken the reading suggestion, was familiar with the method for its compilation, and was thus paying its chief author/editor the critical compliment of credit for what was best and most instructive in the work.

The judgment of Burke's principal biographers and modern bibliographer are of importance as well. Earlier treatments of the *Settlements* were more favorable but less critical toward it and Burke's input. Twentieth-century biographers ignored or dismissed

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<sup>398</sup> Burke Papers, Sheffield, Bk 1/33. In Fuchs, p. 88. Significantly, it is a sign of the degree to which the *Settlements* has been until recently ignored by Burke scholars that in the big appendix to his study of Burke as American colonial agent consisting of letters between Burke and O'Hara, Ross Hoffman excluded this significant letter as presumably having little historical value. Hoffman: "In my edition of Burke's correspondence with O'Hara I have omitted none of his letters that are extant, but of O'Hara's I have included only those which are either responsive to specific Burke letters or contain some historical value of their own. As a result, less than half of O'Hara's letters...are reproduced in this volume." *Edmund Burke, New York Agent*, p. 10.

<sup>399</sup> We know that Burke was then interested in the affairs of Europe and America's mood to "keep alive the spirit of liberty" (*The Annual Register* 1964, preface) indeed as he put it: "there seems to have arisen a spirit of liberty in many parts of the world..." (*The Annual Register* 1965, preface).

it as having little or no significance. Recent studies, however, are just beginning to correct both the lack of critical attention and its canonical neglect. James Prior, Burke's most thorough early biographer, argued that it is without "question but that he wrote, if not the whole of it, at least by far the greater part." Prior invoked the testimony of Richard Shackleton and offered some internal evidence to make his case.<sup>400</sup> He did, however, also suggest, on the testimony of Lord Macartney, that the work was a "joint production" by Edmund, Will, and Edmund's brother Richard.<sup>401</sup> By the fifth and substantially revised edition of his biography, Prior was more definite about Burke's primary authorship, saying of Will that his "assistance, if any, [was] no more than that of amanuensis or reading for references."<sup>402</sup> Prior seemed to have been persuaded that the existence of a copyright assignment for fifty guineas signed by Edmund and representing payment for the work was conclusive evidence that Burke was the principal author. Also, James Crossley contended that he saw the assignment of Edmund to Dodsley, as author to publisher, with the date 2 January 1757. Dixon Wecter reported to have seen that same piece of evidence.<sup>403</sup>

The nineteenth century Irish journalist Thomas Macknight (1829-1899) asserted in his meticulous three-volume study that Burke "was the principal, if not the sole, author."<sup>404</sup> John Morley (1838-1923), another nineteenth-century champion of Burke's American speeches, also assigned him authorship without qualification. He saw in the *Settlements* strong proof of Burke's "early interest in America."<sup>405</sup> Sir Philip Magnus (1842-1933) briefly acknowledged the *Settlements*' place in Burke's early and "unchecked" "literary output," posited that it was written by William "but it was subjected before publication to extensive revision by Edmund," and pointed out its value

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<sup>400</sup> James Prior, *Life of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, I, pp. 66-68. Dixon Wecter on Sir James Prior's life of Burke: "a work with all its shortcomings was based diligently upon many oral sources which have long since passed beyond the historian's verification...." In Wecter, "The Missing Years in Edmund Burke's Biography," *PMLA*, volume 53, issue 4 (December, 1938), p. 1104. William B. Todd refers to him as "the ever-cautious Prior." *A Bibliography of Edmund Burke* (London, 1964), p. 28n.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, p. 52.

<sup>403</sup> Prior, *Ibid.*; Crossly, *Notes and Queries*, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, XII (1873), p. 273. Wecter, in "The Missing Years," p. 1120n, contended that he found such a document in the British Museum dated 5 January, 1757.

<sup>404</sup> Thomas Macknight, *History of the Life and Times of Edmund Burke*, three volumes (London, 1858-1860), I, p. 75.

<sup>405</sup> Morley: "He wrote an *Account of the European Settlements in America*." *Burke* (London, 1888), p. 29; Morley, *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, p. 826.

in treating European colonialism “from a commercial standpoint.”<sup>406</sup> However, the early twentieth-century critic Dixon Wecter dismissed it both as a “competent piece of hack-work” and as a “pedestrian piece of hack-writing,” and believed that the only matter it contributed to Burke’s early record was in lending “color to the rumor that Burke paid a youthful visit to America.”<sup>407</sup>

Furthermore, more recent scholars such as Bertram Newman, Conor Cruise O’Brien, and Stanley Ayling did not even mention the *Settlements* in their respective studies.<sup>408</sup> The American post-World War II Burke disciple, Russell Kirk, passed lightly by the *Settlements*, stating simply that Burke “had some hand in a book written chiefly by his comrade Will Burke,” but then nevertheless posited that the work was of importance in “foreshadowing his later involvement in American concerns.”<sup>409</sup> Carl Cone, Burke’s greatest American biographer, conceded that, “There is evidence of Burke’s participation.” He went little beyond that.<sup>410</sup>

The consensus suggests that while it is difficult to say with certainty which passages were Edmund’s and which William’s, the formers’ influence, editing skills, and direct input pervade the work and amount to a representation of his early views on colonial and imperial relations. Both Edmund and William certainly benefited from the study; because of the learning they gained from it and were able to apply to contemporary politics they acquired a reputation for colonial expertise. Modern scholars have been more cautious about ascribing any part of the book directly to Edmund. Such agnosticism has resulted both in the exclusion of the work from the Burke canon and a practical atheism when it comes to mining it for a clearer picture of Burke’s early thought or for the light it might shed on his later writings.

Still, while method has resulted in previous generations of Burke students diminishing the value of the *Settlements*, the power of the voice so evident throughout the text often carry even the most careful of modern scholars into Boswell’s camp, positing Edmund’s “everywhere evident” contributions. For instance, the best mid-twentieth-century students of Burke’s view of history, Walter D. Love and John C. Weston, Jr.,

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<sup>406</sup> Sir Philip Magnus, *Edmund Burke: A Life* (London, 1939), p. 15.

<sup>407</sup> Wecter, “Missing Years,” p. 1120; Wecter, *Edmund Burke and His Kinsman: A Study of the Statesman’s Financial Integrity and Private Relationships* (Boulder, CO, 1939), p. 17 n69.

<sup>408</sup> Bertram Newman, *Edmund Burke* (London, 1927); Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody*; Stanley Ayling, *Edmund Burke: His Life and Opinions* (London & New York, 1988).

<sup>409</sup> Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (New York, 1967), p. 36.

<sup>410</sup> Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics*, I, p. 29.

spend several paragraphs of their works carefully limiting Edmund's role in the *Settlements*. Love claimed for it a work of "joint authorship," that "The well-known closeness of their relationship at that time...makes it feasible to suppose they could write a book together, in a common effort, just as they lived together, traveled together, speculated in East India Company stocks together, and planned their careers together." For his part, Weston nevertheless enthused some pages after his cautionary remarks that he "would dogmatically assign the chapter on the witch trials in Salem to Edmund Burke."<sup>411</sup> Burke biographer Robert Murray concurred with Weston's assessment, "We can hardly be wrong in that the account of the conduct of the Puritans toward colonists who did not share their religious views" was Edmund's work. "Nor can we be wrong," Murray added, "in also thinking that the generous conceptions entertained of the place of the colonies in the world of statesmanship is Edmund Burke's."<sup>412</sup> While Carl Cone was hesitant to admit Burke's presence in the text, he still could not restrain himself from opining, "Could anyone else have written of the 'cutting and shuffling of a treaty of peace'?"<sup>413</sup>

The number of scholars carried into Boswell's camp has only increased in recent years. In fact, since the mid-1990s, the scholarly stream has begun a turn in favor of the *Settlements*. Burke's latest and most comprehensive biographer, F. P. Lock, cautions responsibly that "the exact nature of [Edmund's] contribution is impossible to ascertain," after which he takes the Boswellian position to "confidently" and "safely" ascribe parts to Edmund—one of his choice examples being a section describing the "Manners of the Americans"—and then arguing that the work "deserves at least semi-canonical status" as a writing in which "the whole owes much to his mind" and contains the "germ" of Burke's great American speeches.<sup>414</sup> The philosophic temperament of Edmund and the economic orientation of Will, Lock concluded, allow us to "confidently" ascribe parts of the work to Edmund, particularly those sections and pages that take large views.<sup>415</sup>

More recently and in another context, Lock has been even more convinced of the need to re-evaluate the *Settlements* as part of the Burke canon: "At the least...we can

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<sup>411</sup> Walter D. Love, "Edmund Burke's Historical Thought," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1956, p. 20; and John Charles Weston, Jr., "Edmund Burke as Historian," a Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1956, pp. 10, 100n.

<sup>412</sup> Murray, *Edmund Burke*, p. 75.

<sup>413</sup> Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics*, Volume I, p. 29.

<sup>414</sup> Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 136, 139, 130, 127.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

conclude that it contains nothing with which Burke disagreed. I would go further and attribute to Burke most of the more generalizing and philosophical material in the book.”<sup>416</sup> In his 1995 work entitled *Edmund Burke, Ireland and the Fashioning of Self*, French Burke scholar Michel Fuchs also signaled a movement toward reevaluating the *Settlements*. It is his view that while “most specialists tend to reduce Burke’s part to the simple task of revising what his friend has written...,” the evidence entitles “us to treat *European settlements* as a book that owes much to Burke, or, at least, as an enterprise in which the joint authors were equally involved.”<sup>417</sup> Luke Gibbons and Sean Patrick Dolan have each accorded the *Settlements* canonical status in assessing Burke’s views on matters of slavery and colonialism, as well as for better understanding core Burkean theoretical concerns such as the relation of laws to manners, conquest to colonialism, and the place of providence in Burke’s understanding of history. As Gibbons puts it: “Though often dismissed as derivative and of little importance for Burke scholars, the *Account* is in fact of considerable interest, demonstrating Burke’s thorough familiarity with the vast range of ethnographic and travel writing charting the shock of the colonial encounter with the ‘other.’ Although it is entirely based on English and French sources, the arrangement of the material is given a highly original cast by being filtered through categories drawn” from Burke’s other early works on aesthetics and the nature of political society.<sup>418</sup>

This thesis carries forward the current scholarly movement in the direction of critically engaging the *Account of the European Settlements in America*. However, it will not assume uncritically what was from the hand of Edmund. Rather, but critically judge which selections from the *Settlements* can reasonably be drawn upon as Edmund’s contribution. Several markers will be used in that endeavor, including internal textual evidence that tracks with Burke’s other early writings and correspondence; internal evidence that is consistent with views he later expressed in the *Annual Register*; internal evidence that is consistent with Burke’s “style” of writing<sup>419</sup>; internal evidence that

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<sup>416</sup> Lock, “Burke and Religion,” in Crowe, ed., *An Imaginative Whig*, p. 30.

<sup>417</sup> Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford, 1996), p. 87. Fuchs then spends a chapter in his work discussing the work critically from a moderate New Historicist and Post-Colonial perspective. See pp. 86-111.

<sup>418</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 200. Also see Sean Patrick Donlan, “Beneficence Acting by a Rule: Edmund Burke on Law, History, and Manners,” *The Irish Jurist*, volume XXXVI, 2001, pp. 239ff, and “‘Little Better than Cannibals’: Sir John Davies and Edmund Burke on Property and Progress,” *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, volume 54, number 1, spring 2003, pp. 12ff.

<sup>419</sup> George C. McElroy has developed and published a “stylometric analysis” for “distinguishing which, of a small group of possible authors, probably wrote a given piece or, in collaboration, which wrote which



compares with his later views as expressed in his political speeches; comparisons with William Burke's extant writings; internal evidence that is consistent with Burke's known biography and inconsistent with William's; and finally, the reputation of his early works among Burke's contemporaries and any associations they might make with him.<sup>420</sup>

At the time of publication of Burke's *Settlements*, ignorance about America and the European experience in settling it was generally widespread. In 1741, John Campbell published *A Concise History of Spanish America*; other than that, knowledge of the Americas came principally from a wide variety of travelers accounts.<sup>421</sup> William Robertson used Burke's *Settlements* as a source for his own, more famous history, commending it in strong terms: "I have borrowed from the anonymous Account of the European Settlement in America, published by Dodsley...; a work of so much merit, that I should think there is hardly any writer in the age who ought to be ashamed of acknowledging to be the author of it."<sup>422</sup> Robertson later told Burke that he sent a copy of his own *History of America* as a testimony of respect to "one of the best judges in the Kingdom on the subject on which it is written."<sup>423</sup> The testimony of contemporary literary giants such as Boswell and Robertson are reminders to scholars of eighteenth-century British views on America and the New World that Burke's *Settlements* is a text that cannot be ignored.

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part." He developed this specifically to distinguish between the writings of Edmund, William, and Richard Burke (Edmund's brother). A detailed analysis of the Burke's stylistic patterns—in terms of average number of words per sentence, ratio of compound-complex sentences, simple sentences, complex-disunified sentences, unified sentences, etc.—of the three Burkes' writing is included as an appendix to his essay "Edmund, William, and Richard Burke's First Attack on Indian Misrule, 1778," *The Bodleian Library Record*, volume 13, number 1 (October 1988), pp. 62ff. It is also put forth in McElroy's contribution to the *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB) in his entries on William and Richard Burke.

<sup>420</sup> There are interesting traces of critical appreciation for the *Settlements*, for example, in numerous early sources from the pens of Burke's peers, Arthur Lee (1740-1792), William Robertson, Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Thomas Malthus (1760-1834), and Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846) among them.

<sup>421</sup> See Richard C. Simmons, "Americana in British Books, 1621-1760, in *America in European Consciousness*, ed., Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), pp. 361-387.

<sup>422</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, p. 492.

<sup>423</sup> Robertson to Burke, 5 June 1777, *Correspondence*, III, p. 350. Emphasis added.

### 3.

## The Aesthetic Origins of Burke's Historical Sense

It is not a coincidence that the scholarly re-evaluation of Burke's earliest American work is largely coming from writers considering Burke's relation to Ireland. Ireland was the great example and inspiration for Burke's historical sense and method. He saw America through his Irish experience, and his experience of being Irish. He was conditioned by a particular understanding of Irish history. Both Ireland and America were part of the empire, but on its periphery; both faced certain abuses of empire. However, one neglected element in studies of Burke historical sense is the scientific orientation of his mind and the implications of it for his thought.

His interest in natural science and natural philosophy, with "the Beauties of the Heavens," was evident in his earliest writing.<sup>424</sup> As he wrote in the pages of the *Reformer*, "besides Riches there are many Things necessary to the Prosperity of a Nation, and bad as the State of Trade is, that of Science is still worse, which as the noblest may be made the most profitable Acquisition of Man."<sup>425</sup> He lamented that along with the debasement in taste, manners, and learning, science in Ireland had suffered for want of enlightened patronage, those "who owe much of their own Fortune" to the benefits gained from such advanced learning being diligent instead on projects that "vitiating Taste" and "in raising Funds for Folly, but none for Science."<sup>426</sup> Writing to Shackleton one year before this number of the *Reformer* appeared, Burke stated that he "was greatly taken with natural philosophy" which "employed him incessantly" and which he called his "furor Mathematicus."<sup>427</sup> While Burke moved on to other "furors," such as "logicus," "poeticus," and, ultimately, "historicus," he always held those committed to the study of natural philosophy and science in high regard. His future father-in-law, Christopher Nugent, a medical doctor, was one example. As Burke wrote in a verse about Nugent:

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<sup>424</sup> See letters to Shackleton, circa 14 June 1744, and 24 November 1744, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 18, 36.

<sup>425</sup> *The Reformer*, No. 4, *WS*, I, p. 85.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>427</sup> *Correspondence*, I, 21 March 1746/47, p. 89.

“Who science lov’d, and yet had only trod—/The Path of Science, as a road to God.”<sup>428</sup>

Indeed, like many members of his generation, Burke’s science was a manifestation of his Christian beliefs, which during his school years in Ireland was still not hostile to scientific thought, or vice-versa.<sup>429</sup>

Throughout the Enlightenment, the philosophy of science was considered one important aspect of the totality of experience, and a powerful force guiding the trajectory of mankind in history. Such an interest, especially in theorizing about the earth, was a hallmark of Enlightenment thinking, notably in the Scottish tradition represented by James Hutton (1726-1797) and carried forward by John Playfair (1748-1819). Adam Smith also speculated on the nature of science and scientific discovery.<sup>430</sup> All saw themselves as beneficiaries and stewards of the previous two century’s philosophical and scientific giants, such as Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton.<sup>431</sup> Commentators and scholars virtually ignore this aspect of Burke’s mind, with the exception of his later pursuits in agricultural science and the innovations with which he experimented on his estate in Beaconsfield.<sup>432</sup> And yet his interest in natural philosophy reveals a quality of Burke’s mind that he later brought to bear on his study of history, for he had within him an aspect of what the explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) called the “imaginative scientist.” Such a thinker was able to transfer mentally back and forth over the ocean if they had the proper sensitivities to art, artifact, and a “cultivated spirit.” This kind of new European thinker could “entertain in his thoughts the appearance of distant regions,” but only if he had acquired the philosophical habit of mind and was able to grasp what von Humboldt termed “the grand conceptions of general physics.” Only such a person could “appropriate all that the intrepid naturalists had discovered and

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<sup>428</sup> “An Epistle to Dr. Nugent,” *WS*, I, p. 52.

<sup>429</sup> For a good overview of the relationship between science and Christianity during this period see Louis Châtellier, “Christianity and the Rise of Science,” in *Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution*, edited by Brown and Tackett, pp. 251-264.

<sup>430</sup> Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 191-198. See also, Lewis Pyenson and Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Servants of Nature: A History of Scientific Institutions, Enterprises, and Sensibilities* (New York, 1999).

<sup>431</sup> For a good analysis of this tradition, and significance of the “common scientist” in Ireland a generation before Burke, see Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study of the Rise of the Scientific Movement in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley, 1965); and K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century: A Study of the Dublin Philosophical Society, 1683-1708* (Charlottesville, VA, 1970).

<sup>432</sup> See Arthur Young, *A Six Month’s Tour through the North of England* (London, 1770), volume IV, pp. 293-297; and *The Farmer’s Letters to the People of England* (London, 1771), volume I, pp. 164-177, for first-hand accounts of Burke’s agricultural acumen and practices, including cutting edge drainage works, experiments and repeated “trials” with fodder crops, and early role in the rival of the practice of oxen ploughing.

travel the winds of the oceans and penetrate into the subterranean grottoes or raise himself up on ice-covered peaks.” Such a combination of imagination and knowledge was, for von Humboldt, the essence of the “enlightenment and civilization” that “influences, for the most part, our well-being.” Burke fits von Humboldt’s description of the nature and significance of the imaginative philosopher, able “to live in both past and present” and “gather round ourselves all that nature has produced in different climates, and which puts us into contact with the different races of the earth.”<sup>433</sup> Burke had the ability throughout his life to see mankind operating in history in a four-dimensional manner, and he could do this because he had trained his mind to look at worlds far beyond his own. An integral part of that training came from natural philosophy. And as so much that was written and thought about America from its discovery through the mid-eighteenth century related to the natural sciences, the role it played in attracting Burke to America is in need of more consideration.

## I.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Burke and his fellow students were encouraged to think along scientific lines while at Ballitore, and his earliest extant letters are filled with enthusiastic reports of such activities and interests.<sup>434</sup> Burke’s pursuit of scientific inquiry was reinforced and developed at Trinity College, where he read Newton, Locke, Descartes, and showed familiarity with Galileo.<sup>435</sup> His interest in science was manifested throughout his early writings. Burke employed Isaac Newton and his method of experimental induction throughout *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.<sup>436</sup> His interest in science was also evident in the pages of the *Settlements*, where he considered mechanical and natural science in the context of the natural and artificial/man-made environment of the Americas. In that way science, like

<sup>433</sup> The discussion of von Humboldt’s *Essai sur la géographie des plantes accompagné d’un tableau physique des régions équinoxiales* (1807) and subsequent analysis of von Humboldt’s views in this regard are considered more extensively by Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, CT, 1993), pp. 17-49. For quotes in this paragraph, see p. 30.

<sup>434</sup> See *Correspondence*, I, pp. 18, 40, 42, 44-48.

<sup>435</sup> See R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin, 1592-1952: an Academic History* (Cambridge, 1982). Just over 3% of the 946 books catalogued in Burke’s library in 1813 were classified in the category of “Natural Sciences.” Source: “Edmund Burke’s Private Library,” an appendix to a Ph.D. dissertation by Jean-Yves Michel Le Saux, Princeton University, 1992, p. 474.

<sup>436</sup> Burke refers to “the judicious rule laid down by Sir Issac Newton” and his work, *Opticks* (third edition, 1721), explicitly utilizing “the same method of reasoning, which we have used in the inquiry into the cause of the sublime....” *Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, p. 300.

commerce, was a barometer for the progressive development of society toward what eighteenth-century Europeans considered to be civilized association. That such a unitary approach to thinking about science was common to Burke and his age is evident in the choice of sources that were used in compiling the *Settlements*, many of which were penned by scientists and had scientific purposes or themes.<sup>437</sup>

How did Burke approach the study and application of science? The pages of the Club's "minute book" provide a heretofore undetected clue to the way in which Burke applied his mind to scientific questions. It also is a clue to the ways in which Burke himself always operated at the frontier of eighteenth-century Enlightenment period. In a fascinating Club debate, Burke's interest in climate, geography, geology, astronomy, and astronomical calculation manifested itself in an assessment of the causes for seasonal change and the nature of the earth's orbit. In one aspect, he anticipated in this debate modern scientific knowledge by more than two hundred years, and in another aspect he evidenced a mind paralleling the forward cusp of scientific knowledge in the early to mid-eighteenth century.<sup>438</sup>

In early June, 1747, Andrew Buck rose to challenge a "remark" of William Dennis on the "figure of the Eclyptick," which Buck doubted "to be Elyptical, or at least that our place in Summer is in ye Aphelion: The cause of which opinion is the temperature of ye climate of Terra del Fuega whose Latitude differs not much from that of our country."<sup>439</sup> Burke's careful and detailed recording of this debate suggested his interest in it, as does his informed participation. He "allows that the coldness of the Southern Hemisphere to be no argument against the Elliptical form of ye Earth's orbit, but doubts our Place in Summer to be in Aphelion. He appeals to ye Map for a proof that

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<sup>437</sup> Of the authors mentioned above as sources for the *Settlements*, Mark Catesby was an English naturalist; Sir Hans Sloane was a Ulster-Scot physician; Charles Marie de La Condamine was a French geographer and mathematician; Joseph Lafitau was a naturalist; Geronimo de Uztariz was a Spanish theorist of mercantilism; William Douglass was a Scot émigré to Boston, medical doctor, and cartographer; Cadwallader Colden was a New York physician who the astronomer Halley befriended and promoted; and Amédée-François Frézier was a French engineer, mathematician, and explorer.

<sup>438</sup> For a better understanding of the scientific and historical context relating to Burke's Trinity Club debate on planetary orbits and climatic change I am in the debt of Dr. Dermott Mullan, Professor in the University of Delaware's Bartol Research Institute and the graduate program in Physics and Astronomy. He graciously gave me an interview on July 16, 2004, in Newark, Delaware, from which I formulated much of the following analysis on this neglected area of the young Burke's thought.

<sup>439</sup> "The Minute Book," Tuesday, June 2, 1747, in Samuels, p. 257.



ye South has more water then ye North....”<sup>440</sup> The question Burke generally took up here was what is the cause of seasonal changes? It was thought that seasonal or climatic change was affected by the earth’s position vis-à-vis the sun; that winter took hold when the earth was farthest from the sun and summer when it was closest. The trouble with this theory became evident in the age of discovery when it was learned that it was both summer *and* winter on the earth at the same time—the Southern and Northern hemisphere alternating the seasons simultaneously. Hence, a new explanation was sought with reference to the tilt or angle of the earth on its axis vis-à-vis the sun’s position.<sup>441</sup> It is in this context that the Club’s notebook (which was in Burke’s hand) recorded Burke making the following points:

Mr. Burke allows the coldness of the Southern Hemisphere to be no argument against the Elliptical form of ye Earth’s orbit, but doubts our Place in summer to be in Aphelion. He appeals to ye Map for a proof that ye South has more water than ye North: Africa being near y Line, & America bearing no proportion to ye Vast Ocean about it: And therefore it water, either intimately or by Effluvia, conduces to ye warmth of a Place; The South should be additionally warmer on that account. In Contradiction to Mr. Buck’s arguments he instances the scorching plains of Arabia; which seem to shew that Land is more tenacious of warmth and sea. And he says, very justly, that ye Trade Winds are ye effect, no ye Cause, of cold. And if wind be instrumental either way, the Sailor has trembled in the Hurricane, will swear the Watry is ye Lee Side of this our floating vessel in ye Heav’ns, & tells you how often he would gladly give whole acres of well grown sea for a foot of Dry land, furs, brambles, Heath or anything. The Gale that fills ye sheat when not a leaf is moved a’shore, rattles through ye shrouds; a blustering declaration, that warmth is its Enemy; & the imping breeze, that curls ye In-Land water, makes a poor fisher-man shrink, when ye Herds-man is unconcerned & warm. Why sighs ye Italian for Aura? Why seeks he ye shade which quivers with ye cooling Blast? Why does he strive to cool ye mid day’s heat in ye refreshing stream? Why all this, if ye wind be warm, or ye waters have in them that heat? Experience and the Nature of things teaches us, other things, than Mr. Buck would have us believe.<sup>442</sup>

Burke’s argument amounted to an impressive grappling with the philosophy and science associated with what, at the time, was an important question; it also suggests familiarity with the most current scientific scholarship. Even more suggestive of Burke’s

<sup>440</sup> “The Minute Book,” *ibid.*, p. 261. Definitional Note: The Ecliptick refers to earth’s particular orbit around the sun. Elyptical is a mathematical description of a curve and, here, the general description of all planetary orbit. The Aphelion refers to earth at its farthest point from the sun (as opposed to the Perihelion which refers to earth at its closest point to the sun). Effluvia is the plural of effluvium, a gaseous vapor.

<sup>441</sup> See Jeffrey Bennett, et. al, *The Cosmic Perspective, Third Edition* (Boston, 2003).

<sup>442</sup> “The Minute Book,” Tuesday June 2, 1747, in Samuels, p. 261.

scientific aptitude was his treatment of the issue. Rather than making dogmatic assertions, the intellectual seriousness that Burke brought to each debate was evident in the five questions he proposed for future Club examination of this subject before the question could be resolved with either moral or scientific certainty. As the minute book recorded:

Mr. Burke proposed ye following Queries for future examination; thinking till they be answered, there can be no certainty of this matter.

1Q. Whether there be not a strong subterraneous Heat & whether it be equal or Superior to ye Solar?

2Q. Whether ye Southern Parts have ye lesser or ye larger portion of ye same?

3Q. Whether ye Calculations of ye Earth's inclination be just?

4Q. Whether ye Southern Segment be not ye greater, i.e. though both Poles be equidistant from ye Centre, where ye Southern parts swell not out more, & ye figure of ye Earth be not that of an egg; so that South circles of Latitude being larger, & consequently every point in each moving faster, ye whole be not thereby less effected by ye Sun?

5Q. Where the Calculations of ye figures of ye Ecliptick be exactly true?<sup>443</sup>

In these five questions Burke wondered if heat came from the earth as it comes to it from the sun. We know now that it does and that it is a vitally important element in the climatic changes Burke was interested in as it creates the magnetic force that gives rise to the Earth's convection. Relating to the second question, it was subsequently determined that the portion of the earth's heat is the same everywhere. Considering the third question we know in retrospect that the young Burke hit upon the key to the issue at hand: for the earth's inclination is the center of the issue of climatic change. It was, thus, vital that before an answer could be had there must be a correct calculation of the tilt of the earth on its axis compared to its orbit. For the earth orbits the sun, while at the same time moves on its own axis. In this reasoning, Burke followed Kepler rather than Galileo, who thought the tides caused seasonal change. What causes seasonal change is the degree (23 degrees as it turns out) of the Earth's inclination compared to its position in relation to the sun. It is thus the sun's light hitting the earth on a glancing angle that causes the change in the weather and air temperature, and thereby accounts for different seasons occurring

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<sup>443</sup> "The Minute Book," *ibid.* pp. 262-263. This "method" of directing intelligent debate is reminiscent of his approach to debating with Richard Shackleton as outlined in a March 1744/45 letter, in which Burke tells Shackleton that before they "proceed any further" in a discussion about the rational capabilities of animals the latter should "carefully" consider the following questions: "1<sup>st</sup> to examine the actions of these creatures as the best rule we have to judge whether they have reason or not. 2<sup>d</sup> to observe what agreement theirs have with those of men and then to search their Causes. 3<sup>rd</sup> to compare both observing this grand Maxim that like Effects spring from life Causes. I might here enumerate more methods but leave it to your better Judgement and maturer considerations...." Burke to Shackleton, 15 March 1744/45, *Correspondence*, I, p. 48.

simultaneously in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Interestingly, proof that the earth was indeed orbiting the sun was only confirmed in 1729.<sup>444</sup> It seems that Burke was either familiar enough with this scientific breakthrough at least to raise the right questions; or, more likely, that his was a parallel or sympathetic mind to the leading scientific thinkers of his day. The example of Burke's recorded pondering whether heat might be coming up from the Earth and, if so, how it might compare to the heat coming from the sun, is a deep question, one worthy of the aforementioned men of science as it was for any of their Enlightened successors.

The fourth question was another example of Burke's ability to penetrate deeply to the heart of a complicated question. For one of the most difficult scientific problems of the eighteenth century was how to determine longitude.<sup>445</sup> The maps were quite precise by Burke's time at detailing latitude, but longitudinally they varied wildly. This was important for Burke, who made "appeals to ye Map" in this debate, as he tried to understand the Earth's shape—which he surmised from his principles was like an "egg." This remained a difficult question beyond Burke's time down to our own age of satellite technology. In the past thirty years, we have been able to answer Burke's question to the effect that the Earth's figure is more of a pear than an egg—with the Southern Hemisphere bulging slightly. Hence, the poles are not exactly equidistant, as Burke suspected. And again, this accounts from some slight seasonal variance. Finally, as for the fifth question, Burke was correct that to possess the right dimensions of the Eclyptick is not a trivial matter. Up even until our own day, measuring the earth's orbit has been a difficult task. The very small number of eccentricity determines much about our ability to know accurately the shape of the earth.

Beyond his formal schooling, Burke, like so many other leading thinkers of his age, was a self-taught polymath. While he might have taken them in directions not entirely consonant with other members of the Enlightenment, his traditionalism certainly found its footing in the main thrust of his age. He was never a nostalgic or merely romantic, eccentrically-oriented thinker. The level and remarkably diverse range of his

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<sup>444</sup> Rev. James Bradley (1693-1762), professor of astronomy at Oxford, discovered what is called "the aberration of light" in 1725 and first reported it to the Royal Society in 1729 (one year prior to Burke's birth). Bradley would later become Astronomer Royal from 1742-1762.

<sup>445</sup> James Harrison (1693-1776) was the clockmaker who invented the first chronometer and solved the problem of longitude. See Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*, (New York: 1996).

intellectual operations throughout the course of his life warrant a place for him high on the list of the greatest minds produced by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. His restless but persistent mind was ever inclined to tackle big questions, go to their roots, and study them exhaustively. This was a chief characteristic associated with the prophetic qualities, or extended views, of his later writings on Ireland, India, France, and America. He expressed this approach with reference to scientific knowledge (but it could equally apply to knowledge of commerce or trade) in the pages of his *Note-Book*:

We ought to be learned *about* Sciences than *in* them.... That is, we ought, if possible, rather to master those principles that govern almost all of them than to sift into those particulars that direct and distinguish each of them separately. By these means we can *extend our views* much more considerably; we keep our minds open, and *prevent that littleness and narrowness* that almost inevitably attends a confined commerce with any Art or Science however noble in itself....<sup>446</sup> [Emphasis added]

Furthermore, his interest in natural science heightened his interest in America and the New World. Burke was exploring such interests when he considered the great New World explorers, the accounts of which filled his library and were cited as sources in his *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Burke admired the ways in which adventurous aristocrats and new men risked so much to extend mankind's scientific knowledge or natural philosophy. In the pages of the *Settlements*, for example, he pointed specifically to an aspect of Columbus' life that paralleled his Club interest in calculations about the earth: "[Columbus] undertook to extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world. This man's designs arose from the just idea he had formed of the figure of the earth...."<sup>447</sup>

Burke himself was always keen to understand and keep abreast of such developments, and would find practical and journalistic outlets for his interest in this area, in one case during the very period that he rose in parliament for the first time to speak on the Stamp Act disturbances in January of 1766. Burke included a long survey of

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<sup>446</sup> *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, p. 84.

<sup>447</sup> *Settlements*, part I, chapter I, p. 6. Burke would later become a keen interpreter of Columbus, and given the interest demonstrated in this debate it is easily to understand why he considered Columbus's theory of the shape of the earth to be "just." Whereas Burke had surmised the earth to be shaped like an egg, Columbus held a similar but modified view that it was like a "pear." This was a controversial idea in the Spanish court and the scientific world of early modern Europe. It was not until the twentieth century that the issue was resolved...in favor of Columbus. See Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1973); Germán Arciniegas, *America in Europe: A History of the New World in Reverse* (New York, 1986), pp. 25-47; and Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, p. 23.

the history of scientific advancement in his historical essay in the 1765 volume of the *Annual Register* (which would have been written early in 1766 and published mid-year). It reads like an annotated bibliography of sources of the kind he might well have been drawing upon in his Trinity debating Club nearly two decades earlier and which informed his studies of and appreciation for America.<sup>448</sup>

It was in large measure this Edmund Burke who would make such a personal connection (a relationship discussed at length in chapter seven of this thesis) with the American statesman, philosopher, journalist, and inventor, Benjamin Franklin. One can imagine Burke and Franklin spending as much time talking about natural and agricultural science with regards to British North America as contemporary problems of empire and trade. Indeed, at the very time Burke was debating the “reason for the seasons” at his Trinity College Club, Benjamin Franklin was in Philadelphia studying the source of East Coast storm winds and conducting his famous experiments related to the attributes and forms of electricity.<sup>449</sup> The contribution such investigations made to the improvement of mankind was manifest to both men, but it was the honest and unfettered pursuit of truth that was the foundation of their commitment to this mode of examination. As Burke aptly noted in the *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, if study of nature and the natural world “does not make us knowing, it may make us modest.... By looking in to physical causes our minds are opened and enlarged; and in this pursuit whether we take or whether we lose our game, the chance is certainly of service.”<sup>450</sup> And in the pages of Burke’s first published work, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), an inventive parody of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751) and the implications of his natural theology if transferred according to its strict logic to the political realm, Burke’s easy incorporation

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<sup>448</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1765, “The History of Europe,” chapter two, pp. 6-8. His list of scientific thinkers and topics included the vegetable system of Jethro Tull, 1674-1741; Henri Louis Duhamel Du Monceau, *A practical treatise of husbandry: wherein are contained, many useful and valuable experiments and observations in the new husbandry, collected during a series of years ... Also, the most approved practice of the best English farmers, in the old method of husbandry* (London, 1759, First edition in English); Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), the father of taxonomy; Benjamin Stillingfleet (1702-71), the leading English exponent of Linnaeus; Sir Issac Newton; Edmund Halley (1656-1742), the British astronomer who was the first to calculate a comet’s orbit; the aforementioned James Bradley; Tobias Mayer (1723-1762), who conducted the first seismological research; Leonhard Euler (1707-1783), author of *Mechanica* (1736), and in 1765 of another major work on mechanics, *Theoria motus corporum solidorum*; Nevil Maskelyne (1732-1811), the fifth English astronomer-royal; George Witchell (1728-1785), the mathematician and Master of the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth who followed in Halley’s footsteps and successfully calculated and predicted the solar eclipse of April 1, 1764; and the aforementioned John Harrison.

<sup>449</sup> See H. W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 2000), pp. 187-206; Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York, 2003), pp. 129-145.

<sup>450</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, preface, second edition, pp. 190, 191.



of his natural science knowledge in parodying “State of Nature” and “Artificial Society” thinking helped to make his case more effectively.<sup>451</sup>

## II.

Burke distinguished his philosophical science from the pure Lockean tradition of his time in his inquiry into man’s notions of beauty and sublimity. The emotive nature of the human mind was a fundamental precept for Burke. As with Locke, Burke’s historical and political thinking was preceded by this basic psychological insight. Indeed, his historic sense was informed by his aesthetic sense.<sup>452</sup> However, whereas Locke’s sensualist method led him to individualistic conclusions, Burke’s led him decidedly to more familial, corporate, and communal ones.

Burke came to his subject through a long process of empirical observation. As with his scientific approach, Burke might start *a priori* via induction, but as his mind was deeply open to the truth of reality his inductions were never absolute. His first reference to an interest in writing on this topic was in a letter to Shackleton in which he related that he had “almost finished a piece—an odd one.”<sup>453</sup> His piece was drafted during precisely the time of the debate about the reason for climate change, and as noted he had been attending lectures on the nature of sight and perception, which suggests that Burke may have been experimenting with styles and methods to best philosophically, and scientifically, pursue or work through his aesthetic ideas. Debating the reason for the seasons gave him an opportunity to exercise his mind in applying Newton’s method of experimental induction<sup>454</sup> to his own interest in human nature, especially as it relates to innate sensual responses to categories such as the sublime and beautiful: “I am convinced

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<sup>451</sup> *A Vindication of Natural Society*, WS, I, pp. 138-153; 177-179.

<sup>452</sup> There is a burgeoning literature on Burke and the sublime that engages the work from the standpoint of intellectual history and literary criticism. See Neal Wood, “The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought,” *The Journal of British Studies*, volume 4 number 1 (November, 1964), pp. 41-64; Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke’s Political Thought* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 119-152; Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology* (Cambridge, 1993); Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the Fashioning of Self* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 149-209; Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Lanham, MD, 2000); Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (London, 2002), pp. 191-201; and Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2003). Of interest here is the application Burke made of his interest in the affective dimension of the human person to his historical and, by extension, later political thought.

<sup>453</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 28 May, 1747, *Correspondence*, I, p. 92.

<sup>454</sup> Burke referred to “the judicious rule laid down by Sir Issac Newton” and his work, *Opticks* (third edition, 1721), explicitly utilizing “the same method of reasoning, which we have used in the inquiry into the cause of the sublime....” *Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, p. 300.

that the method of teaching which approaches most nearly to the method of investigation, is incomparably the best.”<sup>455</sup> As he put it, “By looking into the physical causes our minds are opened and enlarged.” Then quoting Cicero he noted: “*Est animorum ingeniorumque nostrorum naturale quoddam quasi pabulum consideratione contemplatioque naturae*. If we can direct the lights we derive from such exalted speculations, upon the humbler field of the imagination, whilst we investigate the springs and trace the courses of our passions, we may not only communicate to the taste a sort of philosophical solidity, but we may reflect back on the severer sciences some of the graces and elegancies of taste, without which the greatest proficiency in those sciences will always have the appearance of something illiberal.”<sup>456</sup> For Burke, such study and observation followed a progression, beginning first with the nature of the physical world, moving then to the nature of passions or the affections related to the sublime and beautiful, and, after that, to the nature and record of individuals and collectivities, such as nations, operating in and over time.<sup>457</sup>

Burke’s early thought, then, was inductive and empiricist, but only to a point. The method followed from the *a priori* understanding of a world created by a creator, a first and final cause: “The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we every where find of his wisdom who made it. If a discourse on the use of the parts of the body may be considered as an hymn to the Creator; the use of the passions, which are the organs of the mind, cannot be barren of praise to him, nor unproductive to ourselves of that noble and uncommon union of science and admiration, which a contemplation of the works of infinite wisdom alone can afford to a rational mind...; we may be admitted, if I may dare to say so, into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works.”<sup>458</sup> Burke presumed an order to the universe that unfolded providentially through time and the inductive inquiries of successive generations. His psychology and science were moral and religious.

Since a sublime experience is essentially an encounter with limitedness, as the sublime is characterized by terror and by degrees ultimately is traced back to the reality

<sup>455</sup> *Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, p. 197.

<sup>456</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, “The Preface,” second edition, WS, I, p. 191. Cicero quote from *Academia*, 2, 127: “For the study and observation of nature provides a kind of essential food for our spirits and minds.” Translated by editors, n. 1, *ibid*.

<sup>457</sup> For a discussion of the connection between science and aesthetics, see Ernst Peter Fischer, *Beauty and the Beast: The Aesthetic Moment in Science*, Elizabeth Oehlkers, trans. (New York, 1999).

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, p. 227.

of pain and the cognizance of death, “the king of terrors,” Stephen White argues that Burke’s aesthetics is based on the natural and social implications of human finitude.<sup>459</sup> Once again one can here detect the Christian tendency of Burke’s Enlightenment. His emphasis on limitedness or finitude as the basic category of the sublime and his contention that knowledge comes through the senses and not from them, differentiated his aesthetic inquiry from the treatises he was engaging, such as the ones by Longinus and Francis Hutcheson.<sup>460</sup>

As mentioned in chapter one, the personal and social terror associated with the natural and human disasters he witnessed, such as flood and famine, deeply affected the empathetic young Burke. They stirred his reflections related to affective responses early in his life, as was evidenced in a November of 1744 letter he wrote to Richard Shackleton about the “notions” he had “while employed in the dark and difficult Scenes of nature scanning her ends and designs and tracing the almighty Wisdom thro’ his works.”<sup>461</sup> For Burke, as with many eighteenth-century thinkers, the argument from design was a chief way to assert the reasonableness of belief in the existence of God the creator. “It is,” he stated, “by a long deduction and much study that we discover the adorable wisdom of God in his works....”<sup>462</sup> The handiwork of the Creator as evidenced in the material world moved Burke’s thoughts toward reflection and action. That process, begun in the mid-1740s bore fruit in, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. The Preface to the first edition noted that the work published anonymously in 1757 was actually completed four years earlier.<sup>463</sup> It is thus good to keep in mind that work on the *European Settlements in America* likely began near the time he put a near-final draft of the *Enquiry* aside. Burke’s inductive and sympathetic understanding of the sublime was to be in the next decade of his life a tool he critically applied to other

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217. For an extended discussion of this see Stephen White’s *Edmund Burke*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>460</sup> Longinus’s *Peri Hupsous* (*On the Sublime*) was studied at Trinity College as part of Burke’s rhetorical education, it characterized the sublime as the experience, such as the heroic, of limitlessness; Hutcheson’s (1694-1746) *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) was influential for positing the existence of an “internal sense” that allows us to respond in pleasure to beautiful objects. Hutcheson’s pleasure orientation made him more of a devotee of Locke’s. Burke combined pain and pleasure as coordinates to sublime and beautiful experiences in his aesthetic thought, and, thus, always looked at human nature within a holistic framework. See White, *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26.

<sup>461</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 37. 24 November 1744.

<sup>462</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, *WS*, I, p. 268.

<sup>463</sup> “It is four years now since this enquiry is finished; during which time the author found no cause to make any material alteration to his theory.”—which would have made its completion 1753, *WS*, I, p. 188; also Burke to Shackleton, 10 August, 1757, *Correspondence*, I, p. 123; where he said, “it lay by me for a good while, and at last I ventured it out.”

subjected peoples, to the nature and political consequences of passions such as dread and terror, and to forging a deeper understanding of the problem of personal and social affections, that is, to constructing a workable theory of how the passions affected societal bonds, at home and in distant colonies.

In the opening lines of his introductory essay on “Taste,” Burke stated clearly his belief that there exists a universal human nature and uniform human senses: “On a superficial view, we may seem to differ very widely from each other in our reasonings, and no less in our pleasures: but notwithstanding this difference, which I think to be rather apparent than real, it is probable that the standard both of reason and Taste is the same in all human creatures. For if there were not some principles of judgment as well as sentiment common to all mankind, no hold could possibly be taken either on their reason or their passions, sufficient to maintain the ordinary correspondence of life.”<sup>464</sup> The object of his inquiry was in coming to an understanding of the nature of this unity, and the diversity that combined to form it.

Before he mapped peoples, Burke mapped the passions. He began charting them by arguing that the “simplest emotion” is “curiosity” or “novelty.” Curiosity is what begins the movement of the mind through particular experiences. He contended that knowledge is gained through “all the several senses” and filtered by “objects designed to move people advanced in life” by “exciting pain or pleasure.”<sup>465</sup> Burke believed the natural state of the human mind is “tranquility” or “indifference,” as the mind is eased by custom, habit, tradition into a general state of “ease.” Ideas of pain or pleasure, which he argued “are each of a positive nature,” prompt “positive pains and pleasures.”<sup>466</sup> A removal of pain or danger results in a sensation which Burke called “delight.” Advances in positive pleasure he simply called pleasure.<sup>467</sup>

Of the ideas capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, Burke reduced them to two categories. The first was “self-preservation” and is associated with the sensation of pain or danger. Ideas of sickness, pain, and death “fill the mind with strong emotions of horror.” Health and life give us pleasure, but are not as powerful emotions in the self-preservation of individuals. These emotions are the basis of Burke’s

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<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>465</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 211.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

concept of the “sublime”: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.” Burke here completed the thought first expressed to Shackleton in January of 1745 when he reflected on the “great tho’ terrible Scenes” of nature.<sup>468</sup>

The second powerful emotion of the mind was “society” or “social relations” and is connected with the sensation of pleasure. Burke further divided it into “society of the sexes” (which end is procreation) and “general society” (which we have in community with others and with the natural world). These notions of the sexes or “generation” have their origin in pleasures, the object of this passion Burke called “beauty.”<sup>469</sup> Beauty is a particular and “social quality” because it inspires persons “with sentiments of tenderness and affection.”<sup>470</sup> The other branch of Burke’s social passions, “society in general,” gives “no positive pleasure in the enjoyment” but instead “entire solitude,” the exclusion from which or absence of being a great positive pain. Emotions “related to the habitudes of particular society.... Good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship, fill the mind with great pleasure; a temporary solitude on the other hand, is itself agreeable. This may perhaps prove that we are creatures designed for contemplation as well as action....”<sup>471</sup> Sublime objects are large, imposing, dark, and rugged, beautiful ones small, delicate, bright, and smooth. Sublime is masculine, the beautiful is feminine. Corresponding to physical qualities, are sublime and beautiful “virtues,” the former great or strong, the latter subordinate or soft; and for Burke the sublime virtues are “political and military”—and include cardinal virtues such as justice, fortitude, temperance—while the beautiful virtues are “domestic”—and include “subordinate” virtues such as liberality, kindness, compassion.<sup>472</sup> Sublime virtues evoke terror and fear, beautiful virtues attract affection, loyalty, love. In this manner Burke considered the moral dimension of the passions.

The passions forming “the great chain of society” were, for Burke, sympathy, imitation, and ambition. Sympathy is “a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the

<sup>468</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 25 January 1744/45, *Correspondence*, I, p. 39.

<sup>469</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, WS, I, pp. 217-219.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271; 306.



place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected....”<sup>473</sup> This passion may turn upon ideas of self-preservation or pain and be a source of the sublime, or it may turn upon the social affections and be a source of pleasure and thus the beautiful. It is through sympathy that “poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself.” For Burke, passions of self-preservation and society are produced without the intervention of reason: “I am afraid it is a practice much too common in inquiries of this nature, to attribute the cause of feelings which merely arise from the mechanical structure of our bodies, or from the natural frame and constitution of our minds, to certain conclusions of the reasoning faculty on the objects presented to us...the influence of reason in producing our passions is nothing near so extensive as it is commonly believed.”<sup>474</sup> Feelings, hence, arise in man through his physicality as designed by the Creator, and reason only indirectly mediates them. However, the reasoning faculty, distinct from reason independently, is important for judgment. Both reason and judgment are opposed by imagination.

The other important passions belonging to society, according to Burke, are imitation and ambition—each one “of the great instruments used by providence in bringing our nature towards its perfection.” If sympathy aroused concern for what others feel, imitation is an affection that “prompts us to copy whatever they do.” As such, we have a “pleasure in imitating...it is by imitation far more than precept that we learn every thing....” Reason, for Burke, was a “disagreeable yoke,” a “languid and precarious operation”; whereas in learning by imitation “we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly.”<sup>475</sup> However, man cannot perpetually imitate, else he would “remain as brutes do.” To prevent it, “God planted in man a sense of ambition, and a satisfaction arising from the contemplation of his excelling his fellows in something deemed valuable amongst them.” Ambition is what makes “the idea of distinction so very pleasant”<sup>476</sup> in a man. The passions thus considered, are what Burke used to “search into the human mind” and uncover the “stronger traces...of his wisdom who made it.”

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<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209, 268-269.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

Burke contended that his study of the passions, “the organs of the mind,” was to “be considered as an hymn to the Creator....” The uses of the passions “cannot be barren of praise to him” nor are they “unproductive to ourselves of that noble and uncommon union of science and admiration.” Through the inductive and integrated investigation into the nature of reality and the created world, Burke believed “we may be admitted, if I may dare to say so, into the counsels of the Almighty by the consideration of his works.” And while the “elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies...they are of very little service to us. But besides this great purpose, a consideration of the rationale of our passions seems to me very necessary for all who would affect them upon solid and sure principles.”<sup>477</sup> The rest of Burke’s treatise carefully breaks down the particular nature and purposes and affects of the passions as he divided them; with the reasoning faculty uniting the parts to the whole after passions through perception make its object known to reason. In being critical of the reasoning faculty Burke does not attempt to deny its fundamental role in perception, rather that while “reasoning” as opposed to “reason” is characteristic of acting and thinking man, it does follow from the senses and thus should fundamentally be coupled with or tied to human experience to keep it anchored in reality: “surely it is worth taking some pains to have it just, and founded on the basis of sure experience.”<sup>478</sup>

Such experience was memorialized, for Burke, in custom: or what he described as “second nature”; those socialized habits that through the give and take of time chasten and civilize our original first nature.<sup>479</sup> This is one important reason why “manners” become such an important element of Burke’s thought. A man’s sentiments are formed largely by the prevailing manners of his age, and distinguish his relative civility from his primordial brutishness. As he made plain while writing the *Reformer*, the cultural air that persons breathe in forms them, and then becomes manifest in their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It is in this way that Burke related the passions to the bonds of society. He was concerned about the problem of social affection: how does a people form tastes and affections? How do societies form and nurture the affections, and hence allegiances, of

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<sup>477</sup> *Ibid*, p. 227.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid*, p. 228.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*, p. 265. “We are so wonderfully formed, that whilst we are creatures vehemently desirous of novelty, we are strongly attached to habit and custom. But it is the nature of things that holds us by custom to affect us very little whilst we are possession of them, but strongly when they are absent... Very justly [this is] called a second nature; and our natural and common state is one of absolute indifference....”

people? The family, for Burke, was the nursery for such affections.<sup>480</sup> After that, the place of birth, religious and civic associations, and friendships were crucial. As individuals moved away from these bonds, their affections grew thinner and their governing institutions more fragile.<sup>481</sup> Hence, sublime experiences that re-awaken and move persons back toward, or in the direction of, or in conceiving replacements for the fundamental units of association lead to the beautiful experiences of social balance, health, and peace.

Burke came to believe that the colonizing experience was fraught with difficulty precisely because of the removal of Europeans from their elemental associations and common bonds, and because the associations that tended to form in their absence were military ones that had the positive attribute of friendship combining with the negative attribute of violently unsettling the communal affections of the native “others.” This would be an ongoing concern for Burke with regards to imperial policies in colonial British America and in British India. He came to believe that the policies he deemed to be imprudent (or worse) followed from a false aesthetic, one that failed to recognize the need to nurture native manners and customs, familial and religious bonds, and observe the particular characteristics and circumstances of peoples so as to preserve the tranquility of their civil social order, if for no other political reason than tranquility in colonies contributed to tranquility at the imperial home.

The starting place for any imperial reform was thus, for Burke, the recognition of the fundamental importance of securing the affections and shoring up the manners particular to a given society; commercial or other ends could then be pursued through the encouragement of prudent laws. Any subsequent cultivation or renewal of civil social institutions could only take place once habits and affections suitable to any such ends form or revive. This may read like a post-colonial image of Burke in the making, and in retrospect there is some value in such an interpretation of Burke<sup>482</sup>; but more importantly, the payoff of this philosophical speculation for Burke’s later politics was immediate: he was able to seize on the opportunity of colonial unrest in British North America and

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<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

<sup>481</sup> For a discussion of this element of Burke’s thought throughout his writings, see Neal Wood, “The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought,” pp. 47-50.

<sup>482</sup> For a good overview of Burke as an anti- or post-colonialist, see T. O. McLoughlin’s *Contesting Ireland*. A more sustained theoretical treatment of this interpretation, see Sankar Muthu’s *Enlightenment against Empire*.

shape Rockingham Party policy toward it in a manner consistent with his thinking about the nature of social affections, as his central role in drafting, passing, and promoting the Declaratory Act of 1766 would indicate. Burke always believed in the principles of the Declaratory Act as a basis for prudent imperial administration. Its echo of the 1720 Irish Declaratory Act is unmistakable. From Burke's perspective, the American Declaratory Act provided Parliament, and the statesmen that composed it, with the flexibility needed to leverage their authority and gain their desired economic and/or political ends. But this view also required enlightened political statesmanship and sympathetic moral judgment: and Burke would find both wanting throughout his career in Parliament.

The method and propositions of Burke's aesthetical inquiry impacted his historical writing in ways that are rarely considered.<sup>483</sup> His concept of sympathy would become an important element in his historical objectivity and empathetic openness to outsiders and "others." His concepts of Imitation and Ambition became the sources for his interest in developing Character sketches in his writings and speeches. His categories and analysis of the passions provided him with physiological and psychological tools to understand human nature. He created an interpretive filter through which he could better assemble information and make astute generalizations about the nature of any public or private discontent at hand. It was a device he would bring to his histories and to his politics. One cannot explain Burke's thought in its totality as being applied aesthetics, though some critics do.<sup>484</sup> Still, one cannot separate this crucial early part of Burke's mind from the totality of his thought either.

His inquiry into the affective dimension of life paralleled and found expression in his historical writings. History was for Burke one point from which to observe or chart the passions operating through acting persons in particular circumstances and whose actions decisively affected their own fate and the destiny of whole peoples and their cultures. In this way his early study of natural science and philosophy enlarged the scope of the *Settlements*, as well as his later writings. Burke made this connection explicit when he observed in pages of his *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* that, in America, the "organs of the mind" were in high relief. One example being the way in which the native Amerindians religious leaders cultivated "obscurity" to build apprehension, terror, and

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<sup>483</sup> The political implications have been the subject of a few studies, as noted above, but the implications for his histories has been neglected.

<sup>484</sup> See in this regard, Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*.

conformity: “Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans of this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship.”<sup>485</sup> Conquest unsettled the “tranquil” state of indifference, while “terror” was aroused daily by natural conditions of darkness, danger, and separation from society. For Burke, the opportunity to chart daily acts of self-preservation and observe the visceral reality of human finitude made the study of America and its impact on Europe interesting, entertaining, and useful.

### III.

From the mid-1740s through the 1750s, then, Burke was increasingly interested in America. Theoretically, he thought about America in terms of a great historical encounter: an encounter of manners, mores, civilization, and constitutionalism with native barbarism. America offered an unparalleled laboratory in which to apply his growing interest in the craft of history, with which he combined key elements of what today we call anthropology and ethnology with skill and sensitivity. In studying the encounter between civilized and savage, Burke was especially on the look out for models, and his model colonizers were those who, in their character, courage, and statesmanship, demonstrated a high degree of disinterestedness. As Burke observed early in the *Settlements*: “Before this period [of colonization] the manners of Europe were wholly barbarous... [T]he history preceding this era...is nothing but one series of treasons, usurpations, murders, and massacres: nothing of a manly courage, nothing of solid and rational policy. Scarce any state had then very extensive views, or looked much further than to the present advantage.”<sup>486</sup> As with political knowledge, Burke equated a wide diffusion of knowledge regarding economics, mathematics, and the physical sciences with “extensive views.” At the dawn of the startling encounter of European and American, the courts and peoples of Europe were not advanced in such “useful knowledge,” “the ideas of mankind were not extended beyond their sensible horizon.”<sup>487</sup> Aware of the many complexities which inhered in both the New and Old World objects of his study, Burke approached it as a cartographer of civilization, mapping the European encounter with America and charting the march of “civilization” both within Europe and

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<sup>485</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 231.

<sup>486</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 4.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



within their trans-Atlantic settlements. He sought instruction from history that it might provide orientation and contemporary guidance.

Among contemporary historians, Burke read and admired above all others William Robertson. He reviewed and excerpted from Robertson's three principal works in the pages of the *Annual Register*.<sup>488</sup> He also knew, read, and reviewed Hume.<sup>489</sup> Hume introduced him to Adam Smith's writings, and Burke reviewed *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*.<sup>490</sup> In addition to the historians of ancient Greece and classical Rome, he read Voltaire, Montesquieu, Bolingbroke, and Gibbon.<sup>491</sup> Burke's "mode of doing" history first and foremost involved a commitment to scholarly objectivity and impartiality. At the outset of *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757), the reader is advised that, "Whatever is written by the English settled in our colonies, is to be read with great caution; because very few of them write without a bias to the interest of the particular province to which they belong, or perhaps to a particular faction in that province. It is only by comparing the printed accounts with one another, and those with the best private informations, and correcting all by authentic matter of record, that one can discover the truth; and this hath been a matter of some difficulty."<sup>492</sup>

The following year Burke launched the *Annual Register* and in its pages he frequently evidenced how painfully aware he was of the difficulties in writing history, particularly contemporary history. At the time of the first volume for the year 1758, Burke had recently published the *Settlements* and was writing his *Abridgement of English History*. At least at the outset of the *Annual Register* project, then, when he turned from researching and writing about a remote past to chronicling the present, he felt on shakier ground: "We find it very difficult to trace the true causes of events, which time only can

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<sup>488</sup> Burke reviewed Robertson's *History of Scotland* in the *Annual Register*, 1759, pp. 489-493; he reviewed his *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* in the *Annual Register*, 1769, pp. 254-272; and he reviewed his *History of America* in the *Annual Register*, 1777, pp. 214-234.

<sup>489</sup> Burke first met Hume in 1759 at the actor David Garrick's house. He read Hume's essays and philosophical works, and Hume read with admiration Burke's aesthetic treatise. See Burke's approving review of Hume's final two volumes of the *History of England: From the Invasions of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII*, *Annual Register*, 1761, pp. 301-304.

<sup>490</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1759, pp. 484-489.

<sup>491</sup> See Woehl, "Burke's Reading," pp. 184-197. Burke was critical of Voltaire, Bolingbroke, and Gibbon, generally on religious grounds. For instance, he took issue with Gibbon for his favoring the treatment of the Roman government against the Christians. In a review of volume one of *Decline and Fall*, the author, most likely Burke notes that Mr. Gibbon "seems even to labour, with somewhat of an earnestness of an advocate, in favour of the conduct of the Roman government toward the Christians...." *The Annual Register*, 1776, p. 238.

<sup>492</sup> *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, preface.

draw from obscurity...we do not pretend to give the name of history to what we have written.”<sup>493</sup> By the 1761 volume of the *Annual Register*, his “own observations” would “be very sparingly interposed”; for, he declared, “We are historians and not advocates.”<sup>494</sup> And in the 1762 volume he noted, “We relate opinions, as well as facts, historically.”<sup>495</sup> Significantly, the title of the opening essay of the *Annual Register* was “The History of the Present War” and was always referred to as the “Historical Article.”

His commitment to following the trail of sources impartially had one final and important consequence; it inclined him away from the temptation of using history to advance national exceptionalism, of being, as he put it above, “an advocate” and not “an historian.” Such an approach also was an Enlightenment aim and Burke’s method and philosophical sympathy for diverse cultures and peoples conditioned his own anti-exceptionalist orientation. Burke made every effort to be objective in his own historical projects. He also held other historians to this high standard in his reviews. Burke’s effort to be objective was important for his project of looking at people in their own terms, for who they are. It was this effort to *understand* that was the foundation of his pursuit of knowledge and truth.

John Locke famously wrote that “In the beginning all the World was *America*.”<sup>496</sup> New World peoples were to thinkers such as Locke by analogy like the barbarian hordes of Europe’s past. The major thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, such as Hume, Hutcheson, Kames, and Smith, along with Montesquieu, believed that humanity was in essence the same in all places and all times but passed through identifiable stages of development, from nomadic savage to polite and commercial people.<sup>497</sup> The sixteenth century was significant because with the discovery of America, philosophical history could be written as “the political principles and maxims, then established, still continue to operate.” Humanity, Robertson believed, could now be observed in its fullness as the New World effectively “enlarged the sphere of contemplation” and served “to complete

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<sup>493</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1758, pp. 76-77.

<sup>494</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1761, p. 19.

<sup>495</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1762, p. 60.

<sup>496</sup> Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, bk 2, chp 5 (New Haven, CT, 2003), p. 121.

<sup>497</sup> Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (New York, 1830), “View of the Progress of Society in Europe,” pp. 3-4.

our knowledge of the human species.” As such, it was “possible to complete the history of the human mind, and attain to a perfect knowledge of its nature and operations.”<sup>498</sup>

Burke, on the other hand, seemed to have a modified belief in such stage theories. Early in life Burke rejected the simple reduction or elevation of one age, past or present, the inclination of every age to see itself in declinist terms; as well as the opposite tendency of refusing to give past ages and peoples their due. Somewhat surprisingly, he viewed the latter triumphal and exceptional view as the more “pernicious” for it being more parochial. In his first book review in the 1758 debut volume of *The Annual Register*, Burke took up this theme explicitly:

[A] man must shut his eyes in good earnest, not to perceive the nations at one period strongly marked with all the characters of vice and barbarism, by some happy conjuncture emerge to light at another; and distinguish themselves by virtue, by patriotism, by those arts that improve and adorn life; these nations fall again into corruption, vice, and ignorance.... However, this degeneracy is by no means in an even course, some commonwealths having been most glorious in their beginnings; others after they had long continued.<sup>499</sup>

Suggestively, there appeared in Burke’s thought during this time less of the Whig interpretation of history popular in the writings of other, especially Scottish, Enlightenment thinkers. According to James Weston, Burke’s view of progress was “limited,” “qualified,” and principally pertained “to the continuous development and improvement of national institution and laws.”<sup>500</sup> The universal part of Burke’s historical thought was played by Providence.

In the *Settlements*, Burke observed that because it is so certain “that we often reap differently from what we have sown” there must be some greater intelligence involved in guiding human affairs, which he defined as the “strong active principle to give life and energy to all designs, or they will languish, let them be ever so wisely concerted.”<sup>501</sup> Thus, well before writing the *Abridgement*, Burke had, in studying America, already developed a philosophy of history that made room for Providence and the possibility of God’s direct intervention in human affairs. Indeed, contra Montesquieu, throughout the *Abridgement* and the *Settlements* religion and “the wonderful disposition of the Divine

<sup>498</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, I, pp. 268-269.

<sup>499</sup> A review of *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* by Davis and Reymers, *The Annual Register*, 1758, pp. 444-445.

<sup>500</sup> Weston, “Edmund Burke’s View of History,” p. 204.

<sup>501</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 49.

Providence”<sup>502</sup> are among the pivotal influences on the direction of historical events. For Burke, Providence largely worked in history through individual actors (as opposed to, say, nature). His classical reading planted in him an awareness of the efficacy of studying historical actors for contemporary instruction. As he wrote to William Elliot later in life, “How often has public calamity been arrested on the very brink of ruin by the seasonable energy of a single man!... I am sure as I am of my being, that one vigorous mind, without office, without situation, without public functions of any kind, (at a time when the want of such a thing is felt...), I say, one such man, confiding in the aid of God, and full of just reliance in his own fortitude, vigor, enterprise, and perseverance, would first draw to him some few like himself, and then that multitude, hardly thought to be in existence, would appear and troop about him.”<sup>503</sup> More famously was his observation in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796): “A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature.”<sup>504</sup> This kind of history-altering impact of even the most humble or weak individual, Burke contended, could not be explained by reason or through science, but was the result of “the occasional interposition and irresistible hand of the Great Disposer.”<sup>505</sup>

Burke held that Providence did not usually intervene directly in history, but rather was an indirect force that worked through human actors and their purposeful action in history. However, he nevertheless did believe that Providence occasionally intervened directly into history, especially with reference to the development of the institutional, political, and religious life of a people. As James Weston observed, Burke admitted contrary to the spirit of the age that “probably God on occasion directly orders human affairs.”<sup>506</sup> Burke was not unusual in identifying “proximate causes ultimately with the will of God.”<sup>507</sup> An example appears in the *Abridgement* where he described the invasions that followed the withdrawal of the Roman legions: “The ecclesiastical writers

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<sup>502</sup> *Abridgement*, p. 346.

<sup>503</sup> Burke to William Elliot, 26 May 1795, in *Works*, V, pp. 124-125.

<sup>504</sup> *WS*, IX, p. 189. Burke’s great nineteenth-century editor, E.J. Payne identified the common soldier as “Arnold of Winkelried, whose self-devotion on the field of Sempach secured the freedom of Switzerland”; the child as “Hannibal, and the oath administered to him at twelve years old, by his father Hamilcar”; and the girl at the door as “Joan of Arc, who according to one version of her story (probably the true one) acted as ostler at a small inn.” See, *The Select Works of Edmund Burke*, ed. E. J. Payne (Indianapolis, IN, 1999), volume 3, p. 397.

<sup>505</sup> *WS*, IX, p. 189.

<sup>506</sup> James C. Weston, “Edmund Burke’s View of History,” p. 109.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

of that age, confounded at the view of those complicated calamities, saw nothing but the arm of God stretched out for the punishment of a sinful and disobedient nation. And truly when we set before us in one point of view the condition of almost all the parts, which had lately composed the Western empire...we are in a manner compelled to acknowledge the hand of God in those immense revolutions, by which, at certain periods, he so signally asserts his dominion, and brings about that great system of change, which is perhaps as necessary to the moral as it is found to be in the natural world.”

Similarly, a few pages later, in speaking of the reality of miracles, Burke asserted that, “It is by no means impossible, that, for an end so worthy, Providence, on some occasions, might directly have interposed.”<sup>508</sup> In discussing the Saxons’ entry into England and their conversion to Christianity Burke wrote that “we are in a manner compelled to acknowledge the hand of God in those immense revolutions, by which, at certain periods, he so signally asserts his supreme dominion, and brings about that great system of change, which is perhaps as necessary to the moral as it is found to be in the natural world.”<sup>509</sup> For Burke, then, as it would be for William Robertson, Providence often intervened to save pivotal lives or aid them in overcoming obstacles.<sup>510</sup> Divine intelligence time and again advanced what human ignorance would thwart. This notion must have been a source of hope for Burke himself as he looked, at that time, to an uncertain future, his horizon restricted due to birth and the too often stubborn indolence of the governing class. Still, more central to his writing of history was the integration of a number of characteristics—legal, geographical, institutional, religious—into his accounts. He appreciated but still had a qualified view of the role physical factors played in historical development. Chief among his interests in this regard was the nature and development of culture’s manners.

Burke took a lead from Montesquieu—whom he called “The greatest genius, which has enlightened this age”<sup>511</sup>—in his view that manners, laws, and institutions change as the cultures in which they reside change or evolve. He was not interested in

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<sup>508</sup> *Abridgement of English History*, WS, I, pp. 388, 393.

<sup>509</sup> *Abridgement*, WS, I, see p. 388.

<sup>510</sup> Robertson: “At length Providence interposed to save a life reserved for other services.” *History of America*, Book II, p. 62.

<sup>511</sup> *Abridgement*, WS, I, p. 445. Montesquieu’s works were among the most influential on the young Burke’s mind, most especially *Spirit of the Laws*. Burke may have read the original French edition in 1748, but most certainly did read the first English edition at Middle Temple in 1752. The best consideration of Montesquieu’s impact on Burke is C. P. Courtney’s *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford, 1963).



simply charting the fortunes of empires, nations, or individuals, but rather more deeply in understanding society's "manners." As a youthful writer fresh from his law studies at the Middle Temple, Burke's historical writing sparkled with references and historical analysis of the development of English law. However, as he would later write, he always believed that, "Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them, in a great measure, the laws depend."<sup>512</sup>

Manners, for Burke, were the foundation for a society's unwritten or un-codified constitution and they set the social boundaries or expectation for behavior. As such, they cannot be created or legislated. Manners "are what vex or sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them."<sup>513</sup> The "constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation" of manners indicates that for Burke they are pre-rational and pre-contractual or consensual. While "the law touches us but here and there, and now and then," manners permeate society and affect human and social action at all times: "like that of the air we breathe." This accounts for both their fragility and strength. For they give life and order to society, shape its laws and determine its liberty, "give their whole form and colour to our lives." Manners reveal themselves in the immemorial and inherited patterns of tradition, custom, and prescription. They are the basis for a nation's folkways, and are visible in the every day historical record of a people. They were for Burke the font, too, of the rights and duties that are acquired through the passage of time. His historical inquiries were informed by this understanding. Indeed, it was central to his historical thinking and, for him, was an interpretive key. For example, Burke wrote that "The people of Ireland lay claim to a very extravagant antiquity, through a vanity common to all nations. The accounts, which are given by their ancient chronicles, of their first settlements are generally tales confuted by their own absurdity.... It is most probable that Ireland was first peopled from Britain.... The language, manners, and religion of the most ancient inhabitants of both are nearly the same."<sup>514</sup> Ireland, Burke implied, as he was to later argue regarding the white settlers in British North America, was thus intimately connected with the history of the

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<sup>512</sup> Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), *WS*, IX, p. 242.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>514</sup> *Abridgement*, *WS*, I, pp. 509-510.

British people—making Britain’s failure to reconcile the countries throughout the various historical stages of conquest all the more grievous.

As Burke’s own method was comparative, one way to demonstrate the significance of what Burke was doing in the *Settlements* is to compare it with the eighteenth-century’s greatest history of America written by William Robertson, which is what will be done intermittently in the following two chapters where the focus is principally the European discovery of the New World. To that end, Robertson’s intellectual enterprise will provide this thesis with the occasional backdrop comparison to Burke’s efforts in showing how, as Armitage expressed it in another context, “the historical consciousness of early modern Britain accommodated America.”<sup>515</sup> Burke’s efforts to chronicle the European settlements in America included enough touches of “philosophical history,” to make it at least an incomplete or partially started endeavor that exactly two decades later would be realized with all its potency by William Robertson’s first thoroughgoing attempt to write a philosophical history of America in English. Armitage and Peter Burke contend that such a comparative history “was possible only in the period after 1750.”<sup>516</sup> Burke wrote about America during the early stages of the Seven Years War when Britain fought to secure its colonial empire. Robertson wrote and published his work during the turbulent decade of the 1770s, when Britain struggled to preserve its colonial empire.

In common with his Enlightenment contemporaries, Burke, as pointed out, was scrupulous about his sources and the uses he made of them. Both he and the more practiced historian Robertson synthesized a wide range of sources into a single narrative. Robertson drew upon a larger stock of primary sources, having the advantage of source documents from the Spanish archives and dozens of interviews with persons directly connected to various aspects of South and North American colonization. Burke’s sources were detailed above, including one source they shared in common—the *Settlements* itself. Otherwise they both relied on Lafitau, Condamine, Montesquieu, Hume, various travel accounts, probably Charlevoix, Buffon, and las Casas, too.<sup>517</sup> Robertson’s interest in

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<sup>515</sup> Armitage, “The New World and British Historical Thought,” in *America in European Consciousness*, ed., Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), p. 52.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53. See also, Peter Burke’s “America and the Rewriting of World History,” in Kupperman, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-51.

<sup>517</sup> Charlevoix’s *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle-France* (1744) and his *Histoire de Paraguay* (1756); Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* (1747); and las Casas’ *Brevísima relación de la*

sixteenth-century Europe was evident in his history of Charles the Fifth's reign, when "the powers of Europe were formed into one great political system." It is also evident in his philosophical essay or introduction to his great work on the Emperor Charles which he entitled a *View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*. In the preface to that history, Robertson noted that, "Every intelligent reader will observe one omission in my work, the reason of which it is necessary to explain. I have given no account of the conquests of Mexico and Peru, or of the establishments of the Spanish colonies in the contingent islands of America. The history of these events I originally intended to have related at considerable length." However, as a matter of explanation to his readers, "upon a nearer and more attentive consideration of this part of my plan, I found that the discovery of the new world; the state of society among its ancient inhabitants; their character, manners, and arts; the genius of the European settlements in its various provinces, together with the influence of these upon the system or policy or commerce in Europe, were subjects so splendid and important, that a superficial view of them could afford little satisfaction...." Robertson instead chose to write "a separate history; which, if the performance now offered to the public shall receive its approbation, I purpose to undertake."<sup>518</sup> He was true to his promise and seven years later published his *History of America*.

Robertson's history was focused on the history of Spanish North and South America during the age of discovery and conquest, what he called "the most splendid portion of the American story."<sup>519</sup> He began by summarizing the history of exploration and discovery from antiquity to the dawn of Columbus' encounter with the New World. In that he differed from Burke who began his survey with Columbus. Both writers chronicled Cortés and Pizarro's adventures in Mexico and Peru, examined the culture of the native Amerindians at the time the first European explorers stumbled upon them, surveyed their manners, arts, religion, and social organization, observed the native flora and fauna, and considered the consequences of geography upon the development of this "strange new world." Burke spent the final third of his comparative and synthetic study

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*destrucción de las Indias* (1552). See also, Bruce P. Lenman, "'From Savage to Scot' via the French and the Spaniards: Principal Robertson's Spanish Sources," in Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, for reference to Robertson's surpassing of Burke as a historian of Spanish America, p. 207.

<sup>518</sup> Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, preface, p. vi.

<sup>519</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, preface.

on Britain's settlements in North America, while Robertson started such an inquiry but abandoned it while he waited for the resolution of the American rebellion against British authority. His son appended the two books he did finish to a posthumous edition of his *History of America*. Neither Burke nor Robertson included in their respective works elements of the principal myths of the new world, that of "primitivism" or the existence of a "noble savage" unfettered by "civilization" on the one hand, and the anti-Spanish "black legend" that caricatured the Spanish as being merely bloodthirsty and greedy on the other hand. As he stated, "I am satisfied that upon a more minute scrutiny...into the early operations [of the Spanish conquerors], however reprehensible the actions of individuals may appear, the conduct of the nation will be placed in a more favourable light."<sup>520</sup>

Adam Ferguson, friend to both Burke and Robertson, wrote that if "we would form a just notion of our progress from the cradle, we must have recourse to the nursery."<sup>521</sup> In the following chapters we will examine the ways in which Edmund Burke did just that; and saw in the history of the Americas a proxy for the early tribal origins that overtime congealed into contemporary Europe.

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<sup>520</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, preface.

<sup>521</sup> Ferguson, *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, p. 134.

#### 4.

### Burke's American Characters: Individual Lives and the Hidden Causes of History in the *Settlements*

Burke's historical sense was narrative and strongly biographical. As mentioned in chapter one, in the context of his Club debates Burke developed an interest in "Characters." He found this genre particularly useful in his early historical writings which, like his future speeches, were peppered with a generous number of Character sketches. Burke's appreciation for Characters was based on the many examples he found in classical literature. The Character genre was renewed by English writers in the seventeenth century, but Burke did not seem to model his literary portraiture after the more historically recent style of character sketch. His review of a collection of Samuel Butler's Character drawings, for instance, in the 1759 *Annual Register* was not favorable: "A whole volume consists of Characters; the drawing of which was a sort of exercise of the wits of that time; but to say the truth, they are rather, for the greater part, monstrous caricatures than just and regular pictures. They are forced and unnatural, and tire by the repetition of the same thing in new, indeed, but often odd and extravagant lights."<sup>522</sup> Unlike Butler's "profusion of wit," Burke did not draw "fanciful" but real characters of the type found in the classical histories and literature. He admired Sallust's "beautiful painting of characters," and took Sallust as his model. Burke called him "one of the best Historians among the Romans."<sup>523</sup> And in his *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke referred to Sallust's characterizations of Caesar and Cato to illustrate a point of aesthetic theory: "It is worth observing, how we feel ourselves affected in reading the characters of Caesar, and Cato, as they are so finely drawn and contrasted in Sallust. In one, the *ignoscendo, largiundo*; in the other, *nil largiundo*. In one, the *miseris perfugium*; in the other, *malis perniciem*. In the latter we have much to admire, much to reverence, and perhaps something to fear; we respect him, but we respect him at a distance. The

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<sup>522</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1759, p. 469.

<sup>523</sup> *Correspondence*, I, p. 89.



former makes us familiar with him; we love him, and he leads us whither he pleases.”<sup>524</sup> In this chapter the focus will be on how Burke utilized the biographical sketch in a classically traditional way. They provided him with a technique to avoid the mechanistic implications of the Newtonian kind in which history is studied with a view toward demonstrating the existence of general laws. For Burke, reading widely in the lives of great historical figures was an indispensable way to form the prudence and good judgment that comes from experience. Imitation and sympathy combine in the studying of exemplars, both noble and base, to communicate universal lessons from particular experiences for purpose of instructing fresh generations.

The critical skills he developed in this regard were of life-long value to him. One of Burke’s permanent sections in his *Annual Register* (begun a year after the publication of the *Settlements*) was to be called simply “Characters.” When taken with the annual historical article and the collection of book reviews in the early volumes of the *Annual Register*, the “Characters” section provided an important gallery of Burke’s anonymous historical writings at this early period of his life. In the 1758 inaugural volume, Burke introduced this section of his new annual as follows: “We have set apart this article, for some remarkable characters of those, whether in the political or literary world, whether living or dead, who have been distinguished by such talents as merit the public attention.”<sup>525</sup>

Burke’s view of the utility of such character studies—a view that is consistent with his understanding of the purposes of education—was evident in a 1758 review of Fernando Warner’s *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Thomas More*: “There are no sort of books more useful towards forming the mind and manners, than the lives of good and eminent men.”<sup>526</sup> For Burke, Characters were effective in shaping moral judgment and forming taste, as well as for entertaining the reader. In the preface to the *Annual Register* of 1759

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<sup>524</sup> *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, *WS*, I, p. 271. Latin from Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 54.3 “In one the forgiving, dispensing largesse; in the other, no giving bribes. In one a refuge for the wretched, in the other, a scourge of the wicked.” Translation by editors, *WS*, I, p. 271, note 1.

<sup>525</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1758, p. 235.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468. Burke’s favorable treatment of Thomas More in this review would have had crossover appeal to Protestants and Catholics alike. His life was considered a model for a virtuous life. Macaulay would later put More on the same “Enlightened” level as Socrates [Review of Leopold von Ranke’s *The Ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes*, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1840, included in *Miscellaneous Essays and Poems*, volume II, p. 467-469]. Socrates and More are in fact linked as virtuous martyrs killed by intolerance in a judicial matter. Burke specifically cites “the Utopia of More” as a “rich treasury” in his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, p. 145.

Burke informed his readers that the “*Characters*” section “contains a very great variety of accounts of eminent persons, good and bad...we know no kind of reading that can be at once more useful and more agreeable.”<sup>527</sup> Finally, his later speeches included a number of Character sketches, both of individuals who played a key role in American affairs, natives and colonial villains in speeches against Warren Hastings and the East India Company, and generalized subjects such as the Chatham ministry and the American colonists. In his 1774 *Speech on American Taxation*, Burke gave an account of the usefulness of this genre, for his purposes and the edification of his audience that articulates a method he first incorporated in his writings two decades earlier:

Great men are the guide-posts and land-marks in the state. The credit of such men at court, or in the nation, is the sole cause of all publick measures. It would be an invidious thing,...to remark the errors into which the authority of great names has brought the nation, without doing justice at the same time to the great qualities, whence that authority arose. The subject is instructive to those who wish to form themselves on whatever of excellence has gone before them.<sup>528</sup>

Compare that passage with the following excerpt from the first number of the *Annual Register*:

Perhaps the human mind can have no entertainment at once more congenial and more useful to it, than such...stories of extraordinary distresses, and wonderful deliverances. In the former part our humanity is cultivated; in the latter is inspired a spirited hope and a trust in Providence, which may enable us to act with resolution in the trying emergencies of life. They have the effect which Aristotle attributes to good tragedy, in correcting the passions by terror and pity. They give us striking examples of the resources in which ingenious distress is fruitful; and instances as remarkable of magnanimity and virtue, sometimes even in rude minds, and where it might least be expected.<sup>529</sup>

His wide reading in classical letters had planted in him an awareness of the efficacy of studying historical actors to better illuminate fundamental and shared tendencies in human nature for contemporary instruction. Whereas his contemporary David Hume held that the mind or “Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions,”<sup>530</sup> Burke did not. Burke believed, as discussed in the previous chapter, that knowledge came through the senses and that the passions were largely formed by the data being absorbed by the

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<sup>527</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1759, preface, p. v.

<sup>528</sup> *Speech on American Taxation*, WS, II, pp. 452-453.

<sup>529</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1758, p. 278.

<sup>530</sup> Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Book 2.3.3.4, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2005), p. 266.

mind. Hence, the importance he placed on the content of art, drama, painting, poetry, and writing being always elevated and moral. He believed it was crucial they be so because the delicate process of conveying or securing cultural attachments was dependent on the success of each generation's ability to cultivate the manners, tastes, and capacity for sound judgment of the generation rising behind them. Character sketches of eminent historical figures served this purpose in an effective yet enjoyable way. When drafted with imagination and skill such concentrated portrait guides conveyed compelling instruction on the role right and wrong judgments, moral and immoral actions, play in the destinies of individuals as well as nations.

## I.

In the pages of the *Settlements*, "Burke's America" comes into view through a variety of character sketches that are a central element of his compact accounts of political history. His sense of both the contingency and the hidden causes of history worked itself out through examinations of the character and motivations of individual human actors. Michael Bentley emphasized this traditional aspect of history by quoting a prominent nineteenth-century practitioner of the craft: "Thomas Carlyle wanted all history books to be...the essence of innumerable biographies."<sup>531</sup> Burke's histories and his historical sense, particularly as evidenced in the *Settlements* and the *Abridgement*, could not be more aptly and succinctly described.

The historical episodes that give Burke's histories their distinctiveness are developed around the lives of great—both in a positive and negative sense—individuals as well as the character analyses of groups or peoples. In a youthful *Note-Book* entry, he reflected that the usefulness of mastering the principles of a discipline was that it was the "means" by which mankind could "extend" its knowledge "more considerably," thereby opening minds and "preventing that littleness or narrowness" which is characteristic of "confined" minds.<sup>532</sup> This was a concern he brought to bear on his developing image of America and the notion of conquest and empire that follow from it. He unfolded a vision of a colonial empire through the particular example of persons and peoples, colonizers

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<sup>531</sup> Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>532</sup> *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, "Several Scattered Hints Concerning Philosophy and Learning Collected Here From My Papers. [E.B.]," p. 84.

and the conquered that he chose for his “character” drawings. His confidence in the effectiveness of this genre was rooted in his belief that there existed a common human nature and tastes appropriate to it. Literary portraiture was especially effective in this regard. It allowed Burke to universalize a principle or theme of interest to him, as well as to subtly criticize contemporary policies and statesmanship.

Through his wide reading of classical literature at Ballitore and Trinity College, Burke came to believe that the character and conduct of great men are the indispensable agents of historical change. It was a lesson he would apply to this writing throughout his career. In *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), for instance, Burke dismissed Chatham’s slogan “measures, not men” as destructive and false, and in 1789, he warned a French correspondent, “Never wholly separate in your Mind the merits of any Political Question from the Men who are concerned in it.”<sup>533</sup> This early lesson had particular relevance for Burke’s image of America and his criticism of Britain’s imperial policies related to the American colonies. For in time, Burke came to believe that men of character were wanting and imprudent measures proliferating during the turbulent years of imperial crisis between the 1760s and the 1780s.

The biographical sketch was, then, a particular medium through which Burke traced a universal characteristic that he deemed particularly admirable or useful. To his friend the Shakespeare scholar, Edmond Malone, he offered advice on the art of character drawing, “What you are to say of the Character, merely as the Character, of a man, must, to have any effect, consist rather of a few light marking touches than of a long discussion; unless it relates to some of those various and perplexed Characters, which inquire a long investigation to unfold. If without materials one is to attempt any thing of length and elaborate there is a great danger of growing into affectation.”<sup>534</sup>

The “Character” was a vehicle by which he could highlight, through the examples of meritorious lives, concerns about contemporary politics. And he incorporated this method into his own philosophy of history, which in turn contributed to his early sense that philosophical generalizations were a necessary part of historical writing. It was also a “tactic” Burke used to convey larger philosophical insights, and to highlight a central aspect of his historical thinking: the role of chance, Providence, and the unintended

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<sup>533</sup> *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, in *WS*, II; and *Correspondence*, VI, Letter to Charles-Jean-Francois Depont, November 1789, p. 47; cited in Lock, *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> Burke to Edmond Malone, 22 May 1795, *Correspondence*, VIII, p. 252.

consequences of human action. It is instructive to think that Burke's discussion with Edmond Malone about such matters would have likely drawn Shakespeare into the question of Character drawing. In addition to Malone, Burke had life-long and very close relationships with the great Shakespeare authorities of his age, with Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and the actor/playwright David Garrick (1717-1779) being high on that list. Shakespeare was among Burke's most enduring delights and influences. Indeed, one of the heretofore undetected sources of Burke's Character art is Shakespeare. In the *Reformer*, No. 2, Burke discussed at length the elements "which constitute and just Dramatick Performance," and highlighted the "*Propriety* of Characters" and the form of such sketches as a key component of such works. He went on to laud Shakespeare as the greatest artist in this regard: "*Shakespear* had a Genius perhaps excelling anything that ever appeared in the World before him...who found the Springs of Nature so copiously supply'd within him...."<sup>535</sup> And so in the spirit of such new approaches to criticism, the great poet's "Character" plays demonstrated to Burke how one can make the popular Character writers of antiquity, such as Plutarch, relevant to yourself and to your audience. Beyond serious data about largely forgotten people, Shakespeare's art demonstrated how to draw multi-dimensional characters and incorporate religious and psychological insights into the dryer stuff of recorded history.<sup>536</sup> The nexus between imagination, human nature, and individual and national history blossoms in Shakespeare. As it was for Shakespeare, historical causation for Burke was dramatically unpredictable; and so his focus was not only on the great lives of early American history but on the chance events and accidental persons that often determine the fortunes of empires.

The uses to which Burke put this genre of character drawing found effective expression in the *Account of the European Settlements in America*, which is peopled with a broad range of characters that veritably burst onto the stage of colonial history:

It is one of the most necessary...parts of this design to do justice to the names of those men, who, by their greatness of mind, their wisdom and their goodness, have brought into the pale of civility and religion these rude and uncultivated parts of the globe; who could discern the rudiments of a future people, wanting only time to be unfolded in the seed; who could perceive, amidst the losses and the disappointments and expences of a beginning colony, the great advantages to

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<sup>535</sup> See such fulsome references to Shakespeare in the *Reformer*, no. 2, Thursday the fourth of February, 1747-48, such as "my favourite Shakespeare" or "the divine Shakespear." *WS*, I, pp. 75-77.

<sup>536</sup> See Burke to William Richardson, June 18 1777, *Correspondence*, III, p. 354: "Shakespeare having entered most deeply of all the poets into human nature, it is clearly the best subject for criticism."



be derived to their country from such undertakings; and who could pursue them in spite of the malignity and narrow wisdom of the world. The antient (sic) world had its Osiris and Erichthonius, who taught them the use of grain; their Bacchus, who instructed them in the culture of the vine; and their Orpheus and Linus, who first built towns and formed civil societies. The people of America will not fail, when time has made things venerable, and when an intermixture of fable has moulded useful truths into popular opinions, to mention with equal gratitude, and perhaps familiar heightening circumstances, her Columbus, her Castro, her Gasca<sup>537</sup>, her De Poincy<sup>538</sup>, her Delawar<sup>539</sup>, her Baltimore, and her Penn.<sup>540</sup>

What is the reader to make of this last list of Characters? With the exception of Penn, they are all Catholics. The Quaker, William Penn, was perhaps the giveaway because it is in an indication of how much he is speaking from his own background. Edmund Burke was educated by Catholics and Quakers as discussed in chapter one. Here we find the author singling out figures who shared these same religious backgrounds and rather obviously omitting any mention of a New England Puritan: no Bradfords, no Smiths, no Standishs, and no Winthrops. This bias against the New England Puritans became pronounced in the later chapters of the *Settlements*, as will be considered in chapter six.

More immediately, the purpose for introducing these figures early in the account was to raise the question for the reader: Where were such exemplars to be found on the contemporary British stage? And what are contemporary readers and leaders to learn from these examples? These questions form the very heart of the analysis in the *Settlements*. Four attributes characterized the list of Burke's American heroes. First, he believed that greatness in a person was most frequently characterized by the possession of what he called "comprehensive views," meaning a largeness of vision and a "greatness of mind" that was manifest in courageous and selfless acts, particularly ones aimed at advancing the common horizon of humanity and circumscribing ever further its ignorance.<sup>541</sup> Second, was the quality Burke called "disinterestedness."<sup>542</sup> A third attribute was the possession of far-sighted views on trade and commercial policy (meaning wisely regulated but generally free trade). And a fourth trait held by Burke's

<sup>537</sup> Pedro de la Gasca (1485-1567), Spanish bishop and viceroy of Peru. See chapter five for discussion.

<sup>538</sup> Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy (1583 - 1660), French nobleman who after being appointed governor of St. Kitt renounced the King and asserted his sole claim to rule it.

<sup>539</sup> Thomas West, Baron De La Warr (1577-1618). See below for discussion.

<sup>540</sup> *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, vol. II, part VII, chapter XVI, pp. 221-222. See Chapter six for discussions of Baltimore and Penn.

<sup>541</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 62.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid*; II, p. 234.

preferred exemplars was a view of man's social nature that allowed for peace and prosperity to flourish in the midst of religious diversity and the political toleration of sectarian differences. Thus, vast and comprehensive views that fostered a disinterested approach to colonizing the New World and resulted in beneficial commercial and religious practices was the model Burke constructed to judge the contemporary heirs of his characters' enlightened American legacy. Indeed, Burke repeatedly used these categories as criteria for judging his colonial actors, and by extension for evaluating policy and policymakers at home. In these sketches Burke developed a theory of conquest and colonialism that was at the foundation of his later "trustee"-based theory of empire. Long before his prospects for a political career blossomed, Burke's imperial theory was being worked out through studying and writing the history of the Atlantic peoples of Ireland, followed by America, and then England.

In what follows, Burke's great American lives are presented as they highlight one or another of these four characteristics. As a point of comparison, William Robertson's *History of America* (1777) will be considered as the product of a mind parallel to Burke's; a work by a great Enlightenment historian in which the subject matter, method, and analysis track closely with Burke's *Settlements* written two decades earlier. Considering that Robertson admired and drew upon Burke's *Settlements*, and that Burke admired and reviewed Robertson's books, this method of comparing contemporary and like-minded historians on specific historical events and persons will make clear that Edmund Burke deserves to be numbered among the most creative and cogent historical writers of the eighteenth century.

## II.

For eighteenth-century thinkers such as Burke and Robertson, America was an inclusive term for all of North, Central, and South America, including the islands of the West Indies. Since Columbus' discovery, or rather uncovering, in 1492, European observers had studied America, its environment (meaning its physical properties and its habitats) and the character of its native peoples with great interest. America became a contested field, first figuratively and then literally, for competing notions of European manners and civilization. Throughout this early modern era, European power, prosperity, and prestige

were in large part determined by New World colonial fortunes. At home, the primitive character of the New World and its inhabitants led to a new burst of political and philosophical speculations on the nature and origins of man and society. The discovery and settlement of the New World also triggered the development of political economy, as the great commercial possibilities of America and American trade became as apparent and real as the vastness of the new world landscape. And finally, sects of religious believers seeking to escape Old World persecution and build a new and shining “city on a hill” found the absence of established, conservative institutional forces in the New World wilderness sublimely conducive to their messianic aspirations; thus emigrating and, in so doing, establishing the character of future generations of Americans. It was through this prism and by utilizing this map that Burke approached the study of America.

Bernard Bailyn describes the change in consciousness that so affected the Atlantic world at time as “essentially spatial.”<sup>543</sup> Burke seemed to hold the same view. “General knowledge” was being gained through exploration of “an astonishing number” of islands and land masses in “the great sea which divides North and South America,” and whose existence and separation from the European continent was hitherto unknown before Columbus’ dramatic voyage.<sup>544</sup> Two centuries ago, Burke wrote in the opening pages of the *Settlements*, the events and persons surrounding the discovery of America “conspired to change the face of Europe entirely.”<sup>545</sup>

The *Settlements* charted the unfolding of “the Great Map of Mankind” on the two continents, and pointed to the significance of that momentous encounter or clash of civilizations for the future of European. The individual actors and the circumstances in which they found themselves would hold the key to the outcome. And so it was to a series of intriguing lives and their unprecedented and unpredictable decisions or “policies” that Burke turned for guidance. He looked to them for a demonstration of the virtues he would conclude were the cement of good policy, the glue of fair trade, and the bond of enlightenment. For Burke, as for every generation of historians of the Americas since, the character of first recourse was the “first adventurer” himself.

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was Burke’s first Character interest in the *Settlements*. In the later half of the sixteenth and through much of the early seventeenth

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<sup>543</sup> Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 55.

<sup>544</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 14.

<sup>545</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 3.

centuries the image many Europeans had of Columbus was that of a modern empirical and experimental scientist, charting routes to the New World based on careful and original rational deduction with a predetermined and visionary end.<sup>546</sup> He was the great modern New Man. Burke inherited in broad outlines this view of Columbus as the embodiment of the modern spirit given birth during the Renaissance. He praised the navigator's "extensive views," "manly courage," and "solid and rational policy."<sup>547</sup> But his Columbus was a bit more nuanced in that he was also an accidental hero. Burke opened the *Settlements* with an account of how the unintended consequence of Columbus' "just idea" about the "real form of the earth" was misled by "erroneous" maps that led him to "mistake the object" (which he believed was "to find a passage to China and India by the western ocean").<sup>548</sup> The "accident," of course, was his landing in what is now the Bahamas; and significantly modern history for Burke begins at this mistaken moment when "the two worlds...were first introduced to each other; a meeting of an extraordinary nature, and which produced great changes in both."<sup>549</sup> And so Burke's Columbus was nevertheless a far-sighted apostle for the modern scientific spirit who, while uncovering something quite unexpected, had prepared himself for such a discovery by the merit of his fundamental ambition "to extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world."<sup>550</sup>

Thinkers such as Bolingbroke and Hume also believed that the modern age was ushered into being by the discovery of America, that is was a "revolution" "in human affairs."<sup>551</sup> Burke buttressed his support for this notion at the outset of the *Settlements* when he noted that "There was an extraordinary coincidence of events at the time that the discovery of America made one of the principal; the invention of printing, the making of gunpowder, the improvement of navigation, the revival of ancient learning, and the reformation; all of these conspired to change the face of Europe entirely."<sup>552</sup> Europe's achievements set the standard for what would be considered "advanced" civilization. Indeed, Burke's opening point was that when Columbus discovered America, Europe was

<sup>546</sup> See Anthony Pagden's discussion in *European Encounters with the New World*, pp.89-115.

<sup>547</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 4.

<sup>548</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 5-6.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid*, part I, chapter I, p. 6

<sup>551</sup> See, Hume, *The History of England* (Indianapolis, IN, 1980), volume III, pp. 80-82; and Viscount Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and use of History*, in *Works of Lord Bolingbroke* (Philadelphia, 1841), pp. 239-250.

<sup>552</sup> *Settlements*, volume I, part I, chap 1, p. 3.

already ahead of everyone else on earth in technology, science, methods of warfare, government administration, etc. This was not true even four hundred years earlier when there was a comparative equality between civilizations in Europe and the East. This was one reason why both Burke and Robertson were, as noted in the last chapter, so interested in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: during this period seeds were planted that brought commercial advances and cultural flowerings to Europe. It was also an important statement at the outset because then, as it often is now, thinkers generally attributed Western dominance to Enlightenment science; but in fact, as Burke pointed out, the West already had made a decisive turn by 1492, with on-the-ground technological changes that predated the Renaissance.<sup>553</sup> For both Burke and Robertson, then, the Middle Ages were the font of Western progress.

Beyond the seeming happenstance of his discovery and the good fortune of historical timing, Columbus' greatness was advanced in the context of suffering, which for Burke seemed to be a necessary condition of the prophet, who, as in Biblical literature, was seldom appreciated at home. "It was the fate of this great man," Burke noted, "to have his virtue continually exercised with troubles and distress."<sup>554</sup> As Burke knew so well, thanklessness, frustration, disappointment, lack of appreciation, and soft, if not always hard, forms of persecution often await the bold and prophetic "new men" of the new age. It was, however, in the character of such men to keep in mind the lofty nature of their endeavors, clinging always to their original "enthusiasm." From the standpoint of motivation in his great historical actors, a stubborn passion for adventure, even personal glory and wealth, was a necessary ingredient for success. It carried persons of ability through trying times in distant lands and in European courts. As Burke observed at the outset of the *Settlements*, "There is a sort of *enthusiasm in all projectors*, absolutely necessary for their affairs, which makes them proof against the most fatiguing delays, the most mortifying disappointments, the most shocking insults; and, what is severer than all, the presumptuous judgments of the ignorant upon their designs. Columbus had a sufficient share of this quality."<sup>555</sup> Robertson echoed Burke in this regard when he noted that in Columbus he had found a man "in whose character the

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<sup>553</sup> One example: both Burke and Robertson spoke about the impact the perfection of the sailor's compass in the early fourteenth century had on Western progress and superiority. For Burke see *Settlements*, *ibid*, pp. 8-10; for Robertson see *History of America*, Book 1, p. 32.

<sup>554</sup> *Settlements*, volume I, p. 35.

<sup>555</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 7. Emphasis added.



modesty and diffidence of true genius were united with the ardent *enthusiasm of a projector*....”<sup>556</sup>

Throughout his Columbus story, indeed, throughout his study of Europe’s American settlements, Burke highlighted the narrow-minded obstinacy of jealous courts and ministries. Imprudent policy largely characterized Europe and the New World from the onset of their encounter. What Burke detested about imperial policy in the 1760s and 1770s had, by his own account, an unfortunately long pedigree. And yet, the advancement of mankind through the encounter and clash of these different worlds did occur. Character and genius would struggle to overcome ignorance and bad policy. But it would triumph. How it did was the basis for Burke’s heroic character sketches.

Columbus and his trials offered one such case study. According to Burke, his “whole time was spent in fruitless endeavors to enlighten ignorance, to remove prejudice, and to vanquish that obstinate incredulity, which is of all others the greatest enemy to improvement, rejecting everything as false and absurd, which is ever so little out of the track of common experience; and it is of the more dangerous consequence, as it carries a delusive air of coolness, of temper and wisdom.”<sup>557</sup> Burke’s Columbus overcame the temptation, natural to “common experience,” of petty ambitions to conquer a relatively helpless other for pelf and power. Instead, Burke’s Columbus rose above such ephemeral concerns for more noble and selfless work to “to enlighten ignorance” and “remove prejudice.” To that end, as noted above, “Christopher Columbus...undertook to *extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world*.”<sup>558</sup> William Robertson’s assessment compared to Burke’s; he observed that with Columbus’ “extraordinary event, *the boundaries of human knowledge were so much extended*....”<sup>559</sup> Extending the “boundaries” of “ignorance” and spreading knowledge more widely was, as has been argued, a central concern of Burke’s Enlightenment, and his facility with the genre of “character” development was especially useful in this project. Burke thus found commendable in Columbus values that he cherished: a commitment to the diffusion of learning and truth and an ability to endure the trials of doubters and persecutors to

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<sup>556</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, p. 45. Emphasis added. “Projectors” was also a favorite word of Robertson’s. Like Burke, he used it often throughout his *History of America* to describe the effort to “project” Christian Europe’s civilization into the newly encountered civilizations in the Americas.

<sup>557</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 8.

<sup>558</sup> *Settlements*, vol. I, part I, chapter I, pp. 5-6. Emphasis added.

<sup>559</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, p. 64. Emphasis added.

disperse the “delusive air” of false wisdom for truth’s sake. And, most important, Columbus shared Burke’s underlying colonial objective: the disinterested pursuit of the advancement of humanity.<sup>560</sup>

At this young age, Burke may have seen himself in the Columbus story, and the adventurer himself as a fellow traveler and suffering servant of “enlightenment.” After all, his calls for a renewed commitment to the cultivation of native Irish genius through his work on *The Reformer* fell largely on deaf ears; he was an outsider even among his own people. Newly arrived in England, he was even more of a stranger: an Irishman with a distinctive accent and a suspicious pedigree. His genius and abilities being a handicap in his new country, and not having been appreciated in his native land, at least not in ways that would allow him to flourish on his terms and according to his interests, America in the mid-1750s must have appeared a promising and welcoming destination. After all, as Burke himself would trace in his early American history, it is the “outsider” or “adventurer” who defined America’s character and culture. It is likely this “enthusiasm” that Burke brought to his study of the European settlements in America and to his surveys of great American lives. It certainly was an “enthusiasm” for charting his own course in the world, whether in America or England, which animated this “projector” and was a source of irritable pride throughout his life.<sup>561</sup> Columbus’ story, thus, had a personal appeal; but it also gave Burke an opportunity to measure contemporary English colonial efforts against Columbus’ great early example.

It was the belief in the lofty nature and responsibilities of this civilizing venture that dignified the American characters Burke commended as models; furthermore, it was this culturally evangelical or missionary belief that defined the disinterestedness of an adventurer such as Columbus and provided a reservoir of personal strength when adversity or narrow-minded opposition presented themselves. And so it was that

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<sup>560</sup> The Columbus of recent times generally is viewed much differently than the Columbus of Burke’s time. Today he is often characterized as a benighted and rapacious colonial imperialist for white, European civilization, with his only disinterest being the plight of the indigenous population and their natural environment. See in this regard, Kirkpatrick Sale, *Christopher Columbus and the Conquest of Paradise, Second Edition* (New York, 2006). Columbus certainly was not disinterested in the literal sense, rather for Burke this virtue was a comparative quality applied to persons who exhibited in an uncommon way a lesser degree of self-interest and a greater degree of other-interest or elevated interest put to the service of truth and the improvement of humanity.

<sup>561</sup> Recall his words: “I was obliged to shew my passport, and again and again to prove my sole title to the honour of being useful to my Country, by a proof that I was not wholly unacquainted with its laws, and the whole system of its interests both at home and abroad.” Burke in *A Letter to a Noble Lord*, WS, IX, p. 160.

Columbus' project began, for Burke, "with an assiduity and firmness of mind, never enough to be admired and applauded, he at length overcame all difficulties; and to his inexpressible joy...set sail on the third of August, 1492...."<sup>562</sup> Burke captured the extraordinary consequences that often follow from ordinary encounters: "They landed on one of the islands now called Lucayos, or Bahamas, which is remarkable for nothing but this event; and here it was, that the two worlds, if I may use the expression, were first introduced to one another; a meeting of extraordinary nature, and which produced great changes in both."<sup>563</sup> It is the "changes" that this encounter produced in both worlds and for both peoples that interest Burke chiefly in the *Settlements*. By documenting how Europeans and Americans shaped each other prior to the "present war" Burke attempted to provide his readers with a useful resource, or map, for charting the course of Britain's imperial future.

In successive pages, Burke considered the nature of that first encounter of the Christian Cross and European civilization with native "superstition" and culture. "The first thing Columbus did," he details, "after thanking God for the success of his important voyage, was to take possession of the island in the name of their Catholic majesties, by setting up a cross upon the shore; great multitudes of the inhabitants looking on, ignorant and unconcerned at a ceremony which was to deprive them of their natural liberty.... He touched on several of the islands in the same cluster, enquiring everywhere for gold, which was the only object of commerce he thought worth his care, because the only thing that could give the court of Spain an high opinion of his discoveries.... [These islands] were inhabited by an humane and hospitable people, in a state of simplicity fit to be worked upon.... When the Spaniards first arrived in that country, they were taken for men come from heaven; and it is no wonder, considering the extreme novelty of their appearance, and the prodigious superiority they had in every respect over a people in all the nakedness of uncultivated nature.... On his return homewards, [Columbus] touched upon several islands...and discovered the Caribbees, of the barbarity of whose inhabitants he had heard terrible accounts...."<sup>564</sup> This passage evidenced Burke's attempt

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<sup>562</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 8-9.

<sup>563</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 10.

<sup>564</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp.10-11; 11; 12; 13; 14.

to produce coolly dispassionate and objective historical writing. His suppression of moralism certainly distinguished his narrative from, say, a Las Casas.<sup>565</sup>

Burke's sweep through what he considered the initially innocent encounter between "barbarism...and...refinement," as he put it in his 1777 letter to Robertson, or between "the nakedness of uncultivated nature" and the "prodigious superiority" of "men taken from heaven" was noteworthy. In addition to the person of Columbus, Burke's sympathies were with the gentle and unsuspecting Taino Indians whom were "unconcerned at a ceremony which was to deprive them of their natural liberty." It suggests, again, the way in which Burke had an ability to be in more than one place at the same time: he had a European versus native lens to look at America whereas he had an English versus native lens when looking at Ireland. In the former case, he drew from his Irish identity to appreciate the Amerindians, while in the latter case his European side gave him the tools to map the natives place in the progress of civilization. In the American context, the Catholic side was the invader side. The opposite was true in Ireland, where the English conquered and often ruthlessly subdued the old natives of that Island. Burke's Irish background helped him to be sympathetic with America.

Burke's interest in the complexity of human nature and ambitions, however, was evidenced by the way in which he introduced into the Columbus-Indian encounter the specter of the Spanish court's narrow interests (gold) and the "terrible accounts" of the cannibal Carib natives. Native paradise thus had for Burke its own flaws to juxtapose with those of the Europeans. And he was quick to exempt Columbus from the larger flaws of European society. He made clear that gold was not Columbus' main object, but that of the Spanish policymakers. It was a pragmatic matter for Columbus, the only way to secure a "high opinion" of his venture at home.<sup>566</sup> More insidiously, it was the nature of court political pressure that stoked the flames of avarice in the hearts of Columbus' crew. Unfortunately, the "humane and hospitable" simplicity of the native Amerindians made them "fit to be worked upon"—meaning taken advantage of and exploited. And so in the nature of the American act of colonization, Burke located a dual characteristic of

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<sup>565</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P. (1484-1566) was a Spanish priest and settler in Mexico who wrote influential and scathing denunciations of Spanish colonizers treatment of native Amerindians.

<sup>566</sup> William Robertson similarly argued that the need Columbus felt for departing "from his own system of administration" was due to the fact that he "saw that there was but one method of supporting his own credit, and of silencing all his adversaries. He must produce such a quantity of gold as would not only justify what he had reported with respect to the richness of the country, but encourage [the Spanish monarchs] to persevere in prosecuting his plans." *History of America*, Book II, pp. 71, 72.

early European colonialism: on the positive side, a restless commitment courageously to “extend the boundaries of ignorance” and “vanquish” “obstinate incredulity;” on the negative side, an equally restless zeal of European man to extend himself commercially and territorially in ways that are often narrow, exploitive, and violent and which, paradoxically, are a poor basis for successful statecraft.

Along the way and in this regard, Burke briefly considered “mini-characters” who complement or reinforce the point he is making. An early example in this account is the tribute he paid to Queen Isabel of Castile. She was an enlightened monarch of “comprehensive views” in Burke’s story, able, unlike Ferdinand, to see the value of colonies and settlements. As he put it: “It must not be omitted here, in honour of her sex, and in justice to Isabella, that this scheme was first countenanced, and the equipment made by the queen only; the king had no share in it; she even raised the money necessary for the design upon her own jewels.”<sup>567</sup> Isabel, therefore, shared with Columbus the enthusiasms and sympathies of far-sighted colonial “projectors.” Burke’s view seems to be consistent with the historiography of his time and since.<sup>568</sup> For example, William Robertson’s treatment of Isabel and Ferdinand paralleled Burke’s.<sup>569</sup>

For his part, Burke made an important distinction between acts of destruction and discovery in his chronicle of the admiral’s return to Spain after his first voyage. Columbus, wrote Burke, “entered the city in a sort of triumph. And certainly there never was a more innocent triumph, nor one that formed a more new and pleasing spectacle. He had not destroyed, but discovered nations.”<sup>570</sup> Throughout the *Settlements*, Burke’s negative colonial ideal was based on conquest that “destroys” peoples and cultures for the raw self-interest of another people or culture, which generally had the advantage of possessing the superiority of modern technology and thus could impose a collective will indiscriminately. Burke argued that discovery, by contrast, implies obligation, responsibility, justice, and respect for the discovered. Discovery does not give carte

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<sup>567</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 9. Later, Burke again highlights Columbus’ connection to his Queen in naming several islands he discovered in her honor: “These islands, Columbus, who had a grateful mind, in which the memory of his benefactions was always uppermost, called Jardin de la Reyna, of the queen’s garden, in honour of queen Isabella.” *Ibid*, p. 26. Burke is consistently praising of Isabel while disparaging the abilities and intelligence of Ferdinand. As he will do in contrasting Pope Alexander VI unfavorably to Isabel, so too Ferdinand provides Burke the cover to elevate the Catholic Queen by simultaneously deriding the King.

<sup>568</sup> For our time, see Nancy Rubin, *Isabella of Castile: The First Renaissance Queen* (New York, 1992).

<sup>569</sup> William Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, p. 50.

<sup>570</sup> *Settlements*, p. 17.



blanche for wholesale subjection by any means necessary. This observation might well have struck a contemporary chord for Burke's reader, as a war for colonial settlement was going on at the time this work was published. And Burke may well have hoped that his Columbus narrative would lead to reflection of that kind. He also probably had in mind the British "conquest" or "discovery" of Ireland, about which, as will be shown in chapter six, he had a decidedly negative view. After all, his Irish experience was a current moving through his interpretation of the American conquest.

Interestingly, and by comparison, Burke's reading of Columbus would find a parallel in another "Character" he wrote in the pages of his abridgement of English history in the years following the *Settlement's* publication: that of Julius Agricola (A.D. 40-93). Agricola evidenced an ability Burke always admired: integrating and ordering clashing or competing customs, manners, and laws for the benefit of all. The Roman governor of Britain, Agricola, was for Burke a person "by whom it was a happiness for the Britain's to be conquered."<sup>571</sup> Agricola possessed "bold and popular virtues" to which he joined "reserve" and "moderation." Immediately upon his arrival in Britain and conquest of the island of "Mona" (Anglesey), "Agricola observed a conduct very different from that of his predecessor...the island, when he had reduced it, was treated with great lenity.... [He] was a man of humanity and virtue; he pitied the condition and respected the prejudices of the conquered. This behaviour facilitated the progress of his arms; in so much that...all the British nations...yielded themselves to the Roman government, as soon as they found out that peace was no longer a dubious blessing."<sup>572</sup> This description of the virtues and policy of the conquering Agricola was strikingly similar to the sketch of Christopher Columbus and other of Burke's "American Characters" included in the *Settlements*. Like Burke's Columbus, "In the interval between his campaigns, Agricola was employed in the great labours of peace. He knew that the general must be perfected by the legislator; and that the conquest is neither permanent nor honourable, which is only an introduction of tyranny."<sup>573</sup> He also, Burke noted, "eased the tribute of the province...by cutting off all those vexatious practices, which attended

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<sup>571</sup> *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History*, WS, I, p. 366. Burke read and admired Tacitus's *The Agricola* (written likely between 97-98 A.D.). Agricola was, among other things, Tacitus's father-in-law.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*, I, pp. 366-367. Mona was the great center of Druids and of magical beings.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid*, p. 366-367.

the levying of it, far more grievous than the imposition itself.”<sup>574</sup> In this *Agricola* was likely to collect more revenue and encourage economic development in the process. Burke captured in a masterful summary the attributes he would apply to a far-sighted conqueror along with the right policies for a just conquest:

Every step in securing the subjection of the conquered country was attended with the utmost care, in providing for its peace and internal order. *Agricola* reconciled the Britains to the Roman government, by reconciling them to the Roman manners. He moulded that fierce nation by degrees to soft and social customs; leading them imperceptibly into a fondness for bath, for gardens, for grand houses, and all the commodious elegancies of a cultivated life. He diffused a grace and dignity over this new luxury by the introduction of literature. He invited instructors in all the arts and sciences from Rome and he sent the principal youth of Britain to that city to be educated, at his own expense. In short he subdued the Britains by civilizing them; and made them exchange a savage liberty for a polite and easy subjection. His conduct is the most perfect model for those employed in the unhappy, but sometimes necessary task of subduing a rude and free people.<sup>575</sup>

*Agricola* was a “perfect model” for Burke because his policy aimed for a true and lasting peace through toleration, assimilation, the encouragement of education and the diffusion of learning, and in encouraging commerce and exchange by easing the tribute. For Burke, *Agricola*’s achievement was to “reconcile” the Britons to their conquest and their conquerors. Burke reinforced Tacitus’s purposes in writing his *Agricola*, and celebrated the confident affirmation of the first Roman and then later British way of life fashioned in the early days of Briton’s encounter with the Romans. He explicitly saw in the Amerindians a historical parallel to the early Britons, and, as he attributes to them the same virtues, he would have recognized in Columbus a proxy for *Agricola*. Burke noted in the *Abridgement of English History* (penned in the year following publication of the *Settlements*), that “our British ancestors had no regular polity, with a standing coercive power. The ambassadors, which they sent to Caesar, laid all the blame of war, carried on by great armies, upon the rashness of their young men; and they declared that the ruling people had no share in these hostilities. This is exactly the excuse, which the savages of America, who have no regular government, make at this day upon the like occasions; but

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<sup>574</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 367-368.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid*, p. 368.

it would be a strange apology from one of the modern states of Europe, that had employed armies against each other.”<sup>576</sup>

Burke later observed that the native Britons abandoned their failed military methods and would not face the Romans in the open field. Rather, “they formed frequent ambuscades; they divided themselves into light flying parties; and continually harassed the enemy on his march. This plan, though in their circumstances the most judicious, was attended with no great success.” Indeed, he referred to the early Britons “dexterity of forming ambuscades (the art military of savages). . . .”<sup>577</sup> In this regard, Burke then made an observation in the *Abridgement* that he had already made in the *Settlements*: namely that, “In all very uncultivated countries, as society is not close nor intricate, nor property very valuable, liberty subsists with few restraints.”<sup>578</sup>

It is important to notice here that while Burke was moderately anti-colonial throughout both the *Abridgement* and the *Settlements*, he nevertheless conceded that the business of conquest often was an unavoidable necessity of history’s Providential march.<sup>579</sup> This was particularly true of the European encounter with the New World considered in the pages of the *Settlements*. In this sense Burke matured not so much into an anti-imperialist, as into a cautious, prudent imperialist. His study of history taught him that nations cannot impose institutions on a whole people; rather policies need to respond to circumstances and particulars and address them humanely. History shaped Burke’s view of the statesman as one who is always appraising, adjusting, and evaluating. There is never one template; effective government requires eternal vigilance. At this time in his life, Burke saw Ireland behind him and America ahead.

Another suggestive example of the connection between Burke’s Irish and American interests is the manner in which he incorporated elements of his aesthetic philosophy of the sublime. As pointed out in chapter two, he began to sketch out a volume on the sublime and beautiful during his Trinity years. He had put the finishing touches on his treatise during the same time he was compiling the *Settlements*, and published it during the same year. Evidence of mingling his “Irish” aesthetic of the sublime with his

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<sup>576</sup> *Abridgement*, WS, I, pp. 342-343.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 344; 349.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid*, p. 349; and for the same point made about the Amerindians in the pages of the *Settlements*, see I, pp. 175-176 as noted in WS, I, p. 349.

<sup>579</sup> Burke’s references to the role of “a wonderful disposition of a Divine Providence” as the direct or indirect “arm of God” in history are peppered through the *Abridgement* much as they are through the *Settlements*, see pages 347, 388, 393, 399, and 444 for just some examples.

American historical interests appears throughout the *Settlements*, especially with reference to his theory of the nature of “terror” and its relation to the sublime (as developed in chapter two). Consider Burke’s characterization of Indian “dread” and terror and the manner in which he uses his aesthetic philosophy to convey the nature of Columbus’ conquest. On his second voyage, Burke noted, he “made a great ostentation of his cavalry.”

This was the first time the Indians of America had ever seen horses. Their dread of these animals and their riders were extreme; they thought both formed but one animal, and the impetuosity of their charge appeared irresistible to these naked and ill-armed people. Wherever they appeared, those Indians, who intended any hostility, immediately fled; not did they think the intervention of the deepest and most rapid rivers any security; they believed that the horses could fly, and that nothing was impossible to creatures so extraordinary.... But Columbus did not rely upon these prejudices, though he made all imaginable use of them; knowing that those things which appear most terrible at first, become every day less affecting by use, and that they even grow contemptible, when their real power is once well known. For which reason, he neglected none of his former methods of cultivating the affections of the natives....<sup>580</sup>

Burke’s aesthetics of the sublime would become an important device for Burke himself in other contexts, during both the heat of the American and French revolutions. He would draw upon these early American lessons to invoke the terror he felt in the face of both Revolutions. The incompetent handling of the war in the American colonies during the critical year 1777 was exposed in an especially effective way when Burke excoriated the ministry in the wake of the British loss at Saratoga for using Indians and Blacks to advance their misguided efforts and turn “a war of conquest, which had been found impracticable” into “a war of distress and intimidation.” As he described it: “Whole nations of savages had been bribed to take up the hatchet, without a single regular officer or soldier amongst them,” the Cherokees, for instance, having been “bribed and betrayed into war.” The British betrayal of the Cherokees left them, according to Burke, “nearly exterminated” with the remaining natives abandoned to live “in a state of servitude” in the Carolinas.<sup>581</sup> Incompetent policy and immoral leadership were the fundamental reasons why Britain was losing its American colonies. Burke’s rhetorical abilities could make that point by going beyond the facts to arouse the passions

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<sup>580</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>581</sup> *Speech on Indians* (1777), *WS*, III, pp. 355-356; 358-359.

of his listeners or readers to act in favor of what he believed were the just and prudent policies of his party.

In a more negative context, the “savagery” of the Amerindians was later compared to the aims of French Jacobins. He illustrated the point in his narration of the march of the Royal family from Versailles to their violent end. It was the “most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle, that perhaps ever was exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind....It was (unless we have been strangely deceived) a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading into hovels hung round with scalps, their captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized martial nation.”<sup>582</sup> In writing this passage Burke would have had recourse to his reading of *The History of the Five Indian Nations* (1727) by Cadwallader Colden which he used as a source for the *Settlements*. The choice of the Iroquois at Onondaga was also suggestive in that the Iroquois were a potent mix of primitive and civilized. Their highly-developed constitution famously attracted the interest and admiration of Ben Franklin, and yet they were the most cruel and merciless of the Indian nations. Burke was reminding his English readers how perilously close the primitive and the civilized can be; how they can exist at the same time within the same body. Keeping the brutal tendency at bay with man and polity was the chief aim of the civilized.

It was to this end, as Burke noted, that Columbus was concerned to cultivate the affections of the Spanish conquerors, and to order them rightly toward their natural surroundings and to the manners of the natives; for “this wise governor” knew that the Europeans’ “difficulty” in conforming to the “Indian manner of living” was a potential source of both material and physical “evil” for “his people.” A source of the greatness and wisdom of Burke’s Columbus was that he knew that he needed to cultivate the respective affections of the Native Americans and Europeans, and thus attempted to reconcile their various difficulties and manners for the benefit of all. This was the kind of magnanimity in policy that Burke always admired, and would frequently find wanting in English imperial policy. As he would put it famously in his conciliation speech, “Magnanimity in politicks is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and small

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<sup>582</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), *WS*, VII, p. 159.



minds go ill together.”<sup>583</sup> Burke specifically attributed this virtue to Columbus, whose “skill was as remarkable as his magnanimity.”<sup>584</sup> Unfortunately, human nature was not so easily reconciled to disinterested, magnanimous, or mutually beneficial government. Magnanimity with respect to the “other” or the vulnerable was “unnatural” in Burke’s view. It was rather an acquired virtue, the fruit of education, religion, and culture. It was thus a central element of Burke’s biographical sketches that great figures in history put into practice what they knew to be the good.

Burke’s belief in an intervening agent of Providence, as mentioned above, was evident throughout his early writings. One particularly great historical example for him of the existence of the “strong active principle” of Providence that favors individual actors, gives “life and energy to all designs” and thus affects the course of history was provided by Columbus. Burke saw in that great explorer’s often unexplainable good fortune the hand of “Providence, favouring his innocence and assisting his capacity....”<sup>585</sup> And Burke’s view on the role of Providence in history was mixed into his appreciation for the practical and “scientific” Columbus. He did, as argued above, allow for the occasional direct intervention of God for the purposes of advancing humanity—even, or especially, against great resistance. Columbus himself was, in Burke’s view, a vehicle for God’s will, as “Heaven seemed to declare in his favour....”<sup>586</sup> When Burke summarized the unique “character of Columbus,” he found “hardly...any one of the components of a truly great man wanting”:

The character of this first discoverer was extremely different from that of all with whom he dealt, and from that of most of those who pursued his discoveries and conquests; some with a vigour and conduct equal, but all with virtues very much inferior. In his character hardly is any one of the components of a truly great man wanting. For to the ideas of the most penetrating philosopher, and a scheme built upon them worthy of a great king, he joined a constancy and patience, which alone could carry it into execution, with the fortune of a private man. Continual storms at sea, continual rebellions of a turbulent people on shore, vexations, disappointments, and cabals at court, were his lot all his life; and these were the only reward of services, which no favours could have rewarded sufficiently. His magnanimity was proof against all these, and his genius surmounted all the difficulties they threw in his way, except that of his payment....<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775), *WS*, III, p. 166.

<sup>584</sup> *Settlements*, p. 35.

<sup>585</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 52-53.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>587</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 61-62.

In addition to “magnanimity” and “genius,” a key to all of Burke’s American exemplars was highlighted in Columbus’ “...*disinterested behaviour*, his immoveable fidelity to the ungrateful crown he served, the just policy of his dealing with the Indians, his caution against giving them any offence, and his tender behaviour to them when conquered, which merited him the glorious title of their father, together with his zeal to have them instructed in the truths of religion, raise him to the elevated rank of those few men whom we ought to consider as examples to mankind, and ornaments to human nature.”<sup>588</sup>

Burke then proceeded to contrast the character and conduct of Columbus and the Spanish court, arguing that as “we saw all along” the conduct of the Spaniards “was...unjust and impolitic.” Having argued that Columbus is one of the great “ornaments” of mankind, Burke felt compelled to outline the antithesis of the “disinterested” navigator. Burke argued that after Columbus’ death, as it was to a large degree even during life, he no longer was the model of settlement for the Spaniards. Whereas for Burke, Columbus’ “designs were laid in Science and pursued with a benevolent heart and gentle measures,” others had not followed his singular example, “but too often . . . show an enthusiastic avarice, urging men forward to every act of cruelty and horror.”<sup>589</sup>

Columbus was an example for progress; Spanish adventurers and courtiers were generally models of more mixed or deleterious approaches to “discovery” and conquest. As Burke noted, Spain’s, as opposed to Columbus’, settlement of America “was in all respects as fortunate, as the measures pursued were ungrateful and imprudent.”<sup>590</sup> The ministers and the Spanish court represent Burke’s negative example, killing with their “narrow” policies the spirit of true human “enterprise.” Consequently, “things begin to stagnate and corrupt.” It is easy to see in Burke’s character sketch of Columbus how a modern historian such as Anthony Pagden could remark parenthetically that Burke “had a firmer grasp on the historical figure than most.”<sup>591</sup>

For Burke, and later Robertson, the long-term damage done by the court of Spain was in smothering creativity and initiative through bureaucratic and unenlightened

<sup>588</sup> *Settlements*, I, chapter viii, pp. 62-63. Emphasis added.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>590</sup> *Settlements*, I, chapter viii, p. 63.

<sup>591</sup> Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, p. 102. Pagden is another example of a modern historian who attributes the *Settlements*’ philosophical insights and better writing to Edmund. See both *European Encounters* and his *Lords of All the World*.

policy, killing “the spirit of enterprise,”<sup>592</sup> that for Burke, as it would be for Robertson, was such a natural and powerful force in any colonial enterprise. Indeed, it was the foundation for the human and commercial benefits that Burke believed profited both the mother country and its colonial partner. Through “a coincidence of events at that time, which does not always happen so opportunely,” Spain secured the Americas and justified “an ungrateful and narrow policy.”<sup>593</sup> Thus, for Burke, a salutary and beneficial end may result even from unfortunate and reprehensible means. This outcome, in Burke’s mind, seemed due to a mixture of providential design and human agency.

### III.

The human element was for both Burke and Robertson the prime focus of their respective historical accounts. They demonstrated that a rightly ordered “spirit of enterprise” was dependent upon “enlightened” individual actors animated by a sense of what we call the common good and fundamentally characterized by a commitment to the welfare and flourishing of all peoples. Their exemplars were able, by individual genius and an ability to persuade natives of their country as well as newly encountered lands, to cultivate the particular in a host culture while simultaneously seeking to embed the more universal concepts of Christian and European culture. The failure of courts and sovereigns to comprehend, or simply to be too impatient to appreciate, the complexities of nesting European virtues in non-Christian cultures ultimately accounted for, in both Burke’s and Robertson’s treatment of American history, the worst aspects (and even the failure) of a truly and mutually beneficial settlement of the Americas. The opposite of self-interested, consciously exploitive, and therefore “narrow policy” was crucial in such endeavors. It was Burke’s belief that the truly great “conquerors” possessed this capacity to varying degrees. The end, then, of Europe’s universal colonial objective to gain knowledge, expand trade, and enlarge the sphere of political influence was best accomplished by prudent adjustment to particular circumstances, cultural conditions, and group or

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<sup>592</sup> This phrase occurs in both Burke and Robertson: See Burke, “After the discoveries of Columbus had enlarged the sphere of industry to active minds, such a *spirit of enterprise* went abroad, that not only those persons whose indigence might have driven them from their native country, but persons of the first rank went over to settle in America.” *Settlements*, I, ix, p. 67. Emphasis added; and Robertson, “Vast objects now presented themselves. The human mind, roused and interested by the prospect, engaged with ardour in pursuit of them, and exerted its active powers in a new direction. This *spirit of enterprise*, though but newly awakened in Spain, began soon to operate extensively.” *History of America*, Book II, p. 80. Emphasis added.

<sup>593</sup> *Settlements*, I, chapter viii, p. 63.

individual norms. Through a policy of magnanimity all parties benefited and durable relationships fostered. This was a lesson Burke took from the Spanish example in South America, as well as the French and British experience in North America.

Indeed, Burke hoped at this stage of his career, as he demonstrated later in the *Settlements*, that the British would bring to America such an enlightened colonial model, and in so doing unleash the possibilities inherent in authentic freedom for all. Burke would, in time, be disappointed in this regard, eventually mounting a critique of British colonial taxation and trade policy in America during the 1760s and 1770s that paralleled his censure of the seventeenth-century Spanish court. And so it is not hard to see in the aforementioned quote that the men Burke spoke of, “so possessed with their designs,” prefigure his criticisms of the court of George III and his ministers regarding their “stagnate and corrupt” American policy. In the *Settlements*, the intuition in this regard is evident, if not yet the strength of analysis. Here, such men and their “designs” are “examples” that “terrify” other, more moderate, and thus more prudent, reformers.<sup>594</sup>

Similarly, in the *Abridgements*, Burke’s treatment of the reign of John (1199-1216) also anticipated his treatment of George III and the king’s policy toward Britain’s North American colonies. For as Burke wrote: “Then came John to the Crown. The arbitrary taxes, which he opposed very early in his reign, which offended even more by the improper use made of them than their irregularity, irritated the people extremely, and joined with all the preceding causes to make this government contemptible.” John, Burke observed, drew upon himself the hatred of the Church, its “bishops and ecclesiasticks,” and engaged in struggles with the Pope that weakened him politically at home and abroad. He began to lose foreign territories as well, and with it, his reputation. For Burke, the king’s character was chiefly responsible for the his own and his country’s discontents: “Add to all these causes the personal character of the king, in which there was nothing uniform or sincere; and which introduced the like unsteadiness into all his government. He was indolent, yet restless in his disposition; fond of working by violent methods, without any vigour; boastful, but continually betraying his fears; shewing on all occasions such a desire for peace, as hindered him from ever enjoying it. Having no spirit

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<sup>594</sup> Nor would he exempt from criticism the American colonists, in whose commitment to an extreme form of dissenting Protestantism Burke found much that concerned him, including the disenfranchisement and intolerant treatment of racial and religious minorities. This may have been one reason why he was not as appreciated by some of the founders of the eventual United States, particularly Jefferson.

of order, he never looked forward; content, by any temporary expedient, to extricate himself from a present difficulty. Rash, arrogant, perfidious, irreligious, unquiet, he made a tolerable head of party, but a bad king.” He left England weakened and dependent on the Pope and on his vassals.

Burke turned for an alternate model to John’s contemporary, King Philip of France. Whereas John inherited a kingdom, territories, and strong royal prerogatives, Philip assumed the crown when the kingdom of France was disunited. Royal authority was at a low point. Yet he, through character and policy, resisted “Papal usurpation” and “reduced his subjects of all orders to stricter obedience.” And yet, out of this condition created by John’s “vices and weakness” came conditions that “produced the grand revolution in favour of liberty”—Magna Carta.<sup>595</sup>

In Burke’s historical writing, such Characters provided instruction in the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of their lives. Just and unjust policies, prudent and imprudent handling of individuals and orders in society, strength and weakness of character combined to determined the progress or regress of peoples through time. Patterns emerge and consequences become somewhat more predictable. Burke’s critical stance toward the colonial policies of his day was deeply rooted in the colonialism of ages and nations previous to his.

In his account of Columbus, Burke reinforced his “great man” theory. Namely, that people of capacity and genius, who are animated by a disinterested spirit, are often the agents of historical, or even providential, change. For, as he noted, “With regard to America, the conquest as well as the discovery was owing wholly to private men; the court contributed nothing but pretensions and patents.”<sup>596</sup> Burke’s respect for talented “new men” and contempt for small-minded courtiers was evident in his transition from the character of Columbus and his conquest to successive colonial figures. In doing so he first referred to a classical image found in Plutarch: “An ancient painter drew a satirical picture of Cimon the Athenian. He represented this commander asleep, and Fortune drawing a net over cities to put them into his possession.”<sup>597</sup> Unfortunately, in this case Burke must have relied on memory, for while his author is correct, his subject is wrong.

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<sup>595</sup> *Abridgement of English History*, WS, I, pp. 550-552.

<sup>596</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 65-66.

<sup>597</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 66-67.



It is in his “life” of Sylla<sup>598</sup> that Plutarch makes the following point through the character not of Cimon,<sup>599</sup> but of Isocrates’ pupil “Timotheus the son of Conon [378-354], the Athenian; who, when his adversaries ascribed his successes to his good luck, and had a painting made, representing him asleep, and Fortune by his side, casting her nets over the cities, was rough and violent in his indignation at those who did it, as if, by attributing all to Fortune, they had robbed him of his just honours; and said to the people on one occasion at his return from war, ‘In this, ye men of Athens, Fortune had no part.’ A piece of boyish petulance, which the deity, we are told, played back upon Timotheus; who from that time was never able to achieve anything that was great, but proving altogether unfortunate in his attempts, and falling into discredit with the people, was at last banished the city.” Timotheus was a good anti-model for Burke in that he “pursued an individualist and short-sighted policy with outstanding ability.”<sup>600</sup>

Burke’s purpose here was to implicate the Spanish court in the same way, unmerited acquisition combined with imprudent policy: “There never were princes to whom this representation could be applied with more justice, than to king Ferdinand and his successor the emperor Charles [V]. Without forming any plan to the cabinet, without issuing a penny out of their treasury, without sending a regiment from their troops, private adventurers amongst their subjects put them into possession of a greater, and a more wealthy territory, than ever the most celebrated conquerors had acquired by their valour, or their wisdom...”<sup>601</sup> Burke’s assessment of the Spanish court and its courtiers might have been a proxy for the Dublin Castle officials he criticized in the pages of *The Reformer*. They certainly presaged his criticisms of King George III and a succession of the king’s ministers and “friends.” In the latter case, what Fortune had given England, stubborn pride and ignorance could lose.

The second wave of conquerors would, for Burke, mingle the best and worst lessons of Columbus and the Spanish model of conquest. The great navigator had unwittingly unleashed a spirit into the modern world that others would pursue with good or ill—large or narrow—intentions. Either way, however, the conquests would be conducted in spite of any plan of court or cabinet, and carried forward by “private” men,

<sup>598</sup> *Plutarch’s Lives*, volume I, the Dryden translation (New York, 2001), “Sylla,” p. 611.

<sup>599</sup> Cimon was a fifth century B.C. Athenian general and the subject of a “life” by Plutarch.

<sup>600</sup> *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Second Edition, p. 1077.

<sup>601</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 66-67.

not agents of the court. It was the ultimate legacy of Columbus that his discoveries “had enlarged the sphere of industry to active minds,” and that “such a spirit of enterprise went abroad that not only those persons whose indigence might have driven them from their native country, but persons of the first rank went over to settle in America.”<sup>602</sup> Burke’s first sketch of this next wave of explorers and conquerors is a short one of Balboa (1475-1517); and it usefully highlights the attributes that Burke finds most ennobling in his American heroes. “Vasco Nunez de Balboa,” Burke began, “was a man of a graceful presence, a liberal education, a hardy constitution, and that kind of popular bravery, which recommends a man who engages in desperate expeditions....”

This man...followed the tracks of Columbus to Darien, gained the friendship of some of the Caziques, and conquered others. He was the first who discovered the South-Sea [Pacific Ocean]. He settled a colony upon that coast, and built the city of Panama. But according to the fate of all the first adventurers in this new world, indeed according to the fate of most who engage in new undertakings, he never lived to reap the fruit of his labours. He found himself superceded by one [Pedrarias Davila] who had only discernment enough of his merit to raise his jealousy and envy, and who could make no other use of the discoveries of this great man, than to increase his own private fortune. This man was a politician and a courtier, and having in several instances basely injured Balboa, he was too wise too stop there, but under a pretended form of justice cut off his head, and confiscated his estate.<sup>603</sup>

Here in microcosm is an ideal Burkean character set in relief against a representative anti-hero: Balboa is presented as a man of grace, of “liberal education,” hardy and brave, a man of more than “moderate ambition,” a founder of cities who, while motivated in part by the prospects of lucre, nevertheless colonized in the disinterested spirit of Columbus, seeking to extend the horizon of mankind, and like the other “first adventurers” did not live to “reap the fruit of his labours.” Balboa was a martyred character for Burke, the victim of the stubborn resistance and prejudicial opposition of “all such persons, who, unconscious of any merit of their own, are puffed up with any little portion of delegated power.”<sup>604</sup> This was a sentiment that demonstrated Burke’s contempt for any abuse of

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<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>603</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>604</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 33-34.

power; and also for his sensitivity to “new men” wrongfully persecuted by small-minded, self-interested ministers, courtiers, or place men.<sup>605</sup>

Another of Burke’s American characters did overcome official hostility and resistance—Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), an Englishman of “comprehensive views.” In his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, Burke referred to Raleigh as “one excellent individual.”<sup>606</sup> This opinion of Raleigh was first developed in the pages of the *Settlements*.

Sir Walter Raleigh, the most extraordinary genius of his own or perhaps any other time, a penetrating statesman, an accomplished courtier, a deep scholar, a fine writer, a great soldier, and one of the ablest seamen in the world; this vast genius, that pierced so far and ran through so many things, was of a fiery eccentric kind, which led him into daring expeditions and uncommon projects, which, not being understood by a timid prince, and envied and hated by the rivals he had in so many ways of life, ruined him at last.... He was the first man in England who had a right conception of the advantages of settlements abroad; he was then the only person who had a thorough insight into trade, and who saw clearly the proper methods of promoting it....<sup>607</sup>

Burke found a commendable successor to Raleigh’s efforts in the Virginia colonial governor William Berkeley’s (1606-1677) deft handling of the principal agitators in the failed Bacon’s Rebellion (1676) is put forward as an example of just, moderate, and prudential governance.<sup>608</sup> “It must be remarked,” Burke noted, “in honour of the moderation of the government, that no person suffered, in his life or estate, for this rebellion, which was the more extraordinary as many people, at that time, were very earnest in soliciting grants of land in Virginia.”<sup>609</sup> Other, more notable, Englishmen Burke put forward as disinterested models of colonial settlement included Lord De La Warr (1577-1618), of whom Burke wrote, “Regardless of his life, and inattentive to his fortune, he entered upon this long and dangerous voyage, and accepted this barren

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<sup>605</sup> William Robertson penned a comparatively fuller portrait of Balboa and the treachery of Pedrarias, but his essential assessment of Balboa’s character and contribution “to future progress” paralleled Burke’s. *History of America*, Book III, pp. 102-107.

<sup>606</sup> *WS*, III, p. 132.

<sup>607</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 218-219. William Robertson, by comparison, portrayed Raleigh as a more nuanced “projector” of the Old World and, ultimately, as a failure. *History of America*, Book IX, p. 400.

<sup>608</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 222-225.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

province, which had nothing of a government but its anxieties and its cares, merely for the service of his country....”<sup>610</sup>

Similarly, Burke praised James Oglethorpe’s (1696-1785) settlement of Georgia. Oglethorpe, he stated, “very generously bestowed his own time and pains, without any reward, for the advancement of the settlement.”<sup>611</sup> General Oglethorpe was the only of America’s colonial “founders” that Burke came to know personally. As common “friends” of America, Oglethorpe and Burke became themselves friends in the 1760s after the Governor’s retirement and his frequent presence in Samuel Johnson’s and the Club’s circle. Burke’s esteem for the General did not suffer from personal acquaintance. There is only one surviving letter between the two, but it indicates that they shared an ongoing passion and interest in, and by implication an extended discussion of, the fate of Britain’s North American subjects as well as shared idea of the nature of the British Empire. In a 1777 letter from Oglethorpe to Burke, the General called Burke’s recent letter to the Bristol sheriffs “excellent” and wrote that he hoped Burke’s counsels “will be followed.” He praised Burke’s conciliation efforts at “saving the Kingdom, and us All from Destruction.” Burke, in turn, responded to the eighty-one year old Oglethorpe, and in the spirit of great respect and humility referred to himself as “the weakest defender of the colonies” in contrast to Oglethorpe’s role “as one of the most distinguished of their founders.” In a burst of affection for Oglethorpe, the Colonies, the ideal of a federated British empire, and the British Constitution, Burke toasted his correspondent: “May you see the Colony, planned by your Sagacity, and planted by your care, become once more a free and flourishing Member of a free and flourishing Empire! But if this be too much a hope from a Country, which seems to have forgot the true source of its dignity and greatness, may you never have the misfortune of having led Englishmen into servitude and misery in a strange land!”<sup>612</sup> This letter is significant in that it connected Burke’s earliest interest in the American settlements with his contemporary mission to find some political way to preserve colonial British America in a federated, constitutionally bound Empire. His understanding of the history of his subject formed the foundation of his

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<sup>610</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 219-220. Thomas West, 3rd (or 12th) Baron De La Warr, generally known as Lord Delaware, was the Englishman for whom the state, Amerindian Tribe, and river called “Delaware” were named. William Robertson held a similarly high opinion of De La Warr, *History of America*, Book IX, p. 409.

<sup>611</sup> *Settlements*, II, chapter xxv, pp. 264-265.

<sup>612</sup> General James Oglethorpe to Burke, 30 May 1777, and Burke to Oglethorpe, 2 June 1777, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 343-344.

current arguments in favor of conciliation. Oglethorpe must have kindled in Burke a longing for the kind of “characters” he wrote approvingly of in the *Settlements*; a type of far-sighted colonial leadership he found more common in the General’s days than his own.

Another “bold and judicious navigator” put forward as a model in the *Settlements* was Henry Hudson (1565-1611). It was, however, a model with a twist: in failure may lay the seeds of ultimate success. For while Hudson and his companions were lost in an “empire of winter and world of frost and snow,” “his fate so calamitous cannot so much discourage a generous mind from such undertakings, as the immortality of this name, which he has secured by having given it to so great a sea, will be a spur to other to expect an equal honour, and perhaps with better success.”<sup>613</sup> Similarly, in the person of Martin Frobisher (1535-1594), Burke paradoxically found success in the failed attempt to find a passage to India and to settle Nova Scotia: “From the first voyage of Frobisher (1576) an hundred and ten years ago...notwithstanding so many disappointments, the rational hopes of this grand discovery have grown greater by every attempt, and seem to spring even out of our very failure.... But though we have hitherto failed in the original purpose for which we navigated this bay, yet such great designs even in their failures bestow a sufficient reward for whatever has been expended on them.”<sup>614</sup> As Burke made plain throughout the pages of the *Settlements*, extending the frontiers of mankind for disinterested and “rational purposes” was always an end to be sought, and a source of hope for authentic human and national progress.

The largeness of Burke’s own spirit in this regard was evidenced in the *Settlements* by the fact that even while generally critical of French efforts to colonize the New World, he was able to separate, as he did with Columbus and the Spanish court, the meritorious example of great individuals from “narrow” court minds. As one example, Burke briefly provided the sketch of the French role in the settlement of the Carolinas. In it we find a representative Burkean hero of “comprehensive views,” namely: “The

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<sup>613</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 286-287.

<sup>614</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 287. William Robertson made a similar point. Frobisher was, according to Robertson, “an officer of experience and reputation. In three successive voyages...he explored the inhospitable coast of Labrador, and that of Greenland..., without discovering any probable appearance of that passage to India for which he sought. This new disappointment was sensibly felt, and might have damped the spirit of naval enterprise among the English, if it had not resumed fresh vigour, amidst the general exultation of the nation, upon the successful expedition of Francis Drake.” *History of America*, Book IX, p. 395. For Robertson as for Burke, failure was often a prelude to success.



celebrated leader of the Protestants in that kingdom [France], the admiral [Gaspard de] Chastillon [1519-1572],<sup>615</sup> who was not only a great commander, but an able statesman, was a man of too comprehensive views not to see the advantages of a settlement in America.”<sup>616</sup> After the Huguenot Chastillon, a French Catholic representative of Burke’s ideal or virtuous colonizer was Monsieur Philippe de Lonvilliers de Poincy (1583-1660), governor of France’s American settlements on the island of *Saint-Christophe*. In this case, Burke captured for his readers all of the virtues embodied in his ideal colonial governor: a) disinterestedness “he excelled not more to his own honour, than to the benefit of the colonies” b) sound or “prudent management” c) status and integrity “of a good family; of an unblemished reputation for probity” d) broad learning “of great reading”; applied learning “a genius variously exercised” e) science “he was a master in mechanical learning” f) inventiveness “He first taught... He improved the methods...” g) common good “he kept a watchful eye and a severe hand upon all, who were for making hasty fortunes without adding to the publick stock” h) justice “he made admirable regulations for the speedy and impartial administration of justice” i) the indispensability of religion to social order “knowing that all order must depend for its blessing above, and its effect here upon an attention to religion” j) moderation “[he] settled priests in them with a competent, but not superfluous provision.” The result: A settlement that “began to flourish, and that with very little help from home.” “A plain proof,” as Burke observed in words fit to bring this section to a close, “that almost everything depends...on chusing proper men to command.”<sup>617</sup>

In an age when factors such as climate were thought to be determinative of behavior (Montesquieu), and others, soon anyway, would sketch tableau of progress based principally on material things (Smith), Burke seems rather traditional in his emphasis on character and the virtues (however inchoately he understood them). While he also would approve of and incorporate some of these Montesquieuian and Smithian emphases, he was not limited by them. Later in life, Burke wrote that “Admiration” was

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<sup>615</sup> Chastillon, also Count the Coligny and thus often called Admiral de Coligny, was the Huguenot’s leader killed with 50,000 other Huguenots in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day. Burke’s obvious approval of him suggests a theme that will be considered later in this thesis, the role of religious toleration in “Burke’s America.”

<sup>616</sup> *Settlements*, II, chapter xix, p. 234. See page 235 for Burke’s account of the fate of the admiral, “destroyed at the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew.”

<sup>617</sup> *Settlements*, II, part V, chapter I, pp. 6-8.

the “first sort of obedience.”<sup>618</sup> If was, for him, true as it related to individuals and forms of government. Like Plutarch or Polybius before him, and like Robertson shortly after him, Burke understood the relationship between character and fortune in the making of ancient and contemporary history. Choice and chance provided pivotal opportunities that were ultimately history making. As everything depended on correct and prudent judgments in such a circumstance, everything also relied on a person’s character formation. Imitation in this sense was a key factor in this formation process, and by extension in securing social bonds through generations.

Exemplary lives “proved instructive,” as he would write in his *Speech on American Taxation* (1774), “to those who wish to form themselves on whatever excellence has gone before them.” His philosophical view of the crucial role custom plays in linking society over time presupposed a living engagement with a shared past. Eminent lives were one crucial way to make those connections. And while figures such as Gibbon and Voltaire were both traditional in their historiography, and like Burke produced pen-sketches of Characters, the age, the trend, was headed elsewhere—either with Romantic theories or Rationalist ones. In the long run, though, it is hard to dismiss the effectiveness, freshness, and perennial appeal of Burke’s approach. He is still worth reading long after many of his contemporaries have ceased to be.

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<sup>618</sup> *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), *WS*, IX, p. 600.



## 5.

### Conquest in the New World: Burke's Abridged History of the Americas

Burke's characters sketches were not solitary biographical pieces; they were embedded in a larger attempt to write a narrative political history of the origins and development of the principal colonial empires in the New World. Burke's historical sense was characterized by his understanding of the present as the product of the historical forces that preceded it. As William Todd wrote, Burke's historical mind was marked by "his ability to present events, institutions, customs back to their origins."<sup>619</sup> His attachment to the "abridged" form of historical writing followed from this orientation. It was pronounced in the title of his unpublished *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History*. Whereas Bolingbroke believed that an abridged history was not worth writing, Burke's mind was drawn not to the full and detailed chronology of periods but to the larger meaning of new developments, individual lives, rise and fall of nations, and a range of intellectual and political movements.<sup>620</sup> Such a historiographic approach was Burke's intention when he set down to compile what he would later describe as "the eventful history of the revolutions of America."<sup>621</sup> Before considering the colonial history of the North American British colonies, Burke attempted to explain the struggles and outcomes of the imperial clash in America between European powers and the native inhabitants of Mexico and Peru. He saw continuity between the earliest experiences of conquest and colonization in South and North America. Hence, his understanding of the British colonization of North America was informed by his view of the Spanish settlement in South America, as well as by the competing French settlements in the islands of the west Indies and North America. This chapter seeks to chronicle the nature of what might be called Burke's Abridgement of the Americas History.

On the eve of the age of democratic revolutions in America and Europe, Edmund Burke was an aspiring writer thinking about an earlier age of "revolution"—the

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<sup>619</sup> Todd, editor, *WS*, I, p. 333.

<sup>620</sup> An assertion made by Todd, *Ibid.* Bolingbroke's view is found in "Letters on the Study and Use of History."

<sup>621</sup> *Speech on American Taxation* (1774), *WS*, II, p. 452.

revolution that shook the entire Western world upon the discovery and conquest of heretofore unknown, but nevertheless advanced civilizations. Burke's study of the European settlements in the Americas complicated for him the conventional picture either of a land of uncultivated savages or of innocents living in a perfect state of nature. He quite naturally brought to his developing American image his historical understanding of the manners of the Irish people and the nature and legacy of the English conquest of his "poor country." It was a strangely comfortable fit. His Irish feeling and learning gave him a unique perspective from which to view the complicated encounter of Europe with the "other" in another world. His understanding, in the context of Ireland, that a conquering civilization or people is not necessarily superior to the conquered civilization and people allowed him to entertain the possibility that in some key respects, the Europeans and their culture were not as advanced as the native Amerindians (the Aztecs and Incas in South America and the Indian Nations in North America) that they encountered and subdued. In this way Burke evidenced "sympathy" for the native peoples of America that was in many ways more deeply felt than was William Robertson's.

Here, too, Burke's view of progress and history unfolded and began to take a Montesquieuian turn. The distinction he made between "human" and "material" progress, and their mutual dependence, is key. Materially, the Europeans had progressed well beyond the native Americans. Outside of science and technology, however, the picture was more complex. The state of manners, mores, and character, and the matrix of religious, political, economic, and legal institutions of the great Amerindian civilizations, was, on their own terms, impressive. If, as Burke believed, God worked providentially in history through the agency of man, then He did so in the isolated civilizations in America as much as He did in Europe. Great individual "characters" advanced humanity in both the known and unknown worlds until their mutual revelation brought them together and began a new historical era for mankind. Burke had the ability to see events and peoples from the other side. He had been conditioned in his Irish world to do so. As discussed in chapter two, this empathy, concern for balance, and the critical use of his sources in the service of both were the hallmark of Burke's historical method. In retrospect, such a commitment to new modes of objectivity (which became a banner for some historians, like Hume, to march under and wage combat against religion) highlights a personal paradox that if he was aware of, he kept hidden: namely, that while Burke in his craft was



deeply “modern,” he employed his contemporary sensibility in the service of renewing ancient constitutions and *ancien régimes*, pre-modern customs and prescription, venerable institutions and mores—all the more to secure, and not undermine or reject, the foundations of modernity itself. In this we find the essence of both his “liberalism” and his “conservatism.”

His political history of the great encounter between the Aztec and then Inca empires with the empire of Spain was another example of Burke’s ability early in his career to assess, compile, and write a thematically-based “abridgement” of history. His writing on America is important both for its advanced, for the time, treatment of the subject and for the foundation established for his later political thought by the historical knowledge he gained from it. His interest in Spain’s colonial empire is also yet another parallel to Robertson. Burke’s political history of Spanish America was not as detailed and comprehensive as Robertson’s would be two decades later. However, his ability to penetrate to the philosophical essence or significance of an episode’s or individual actor’s historical meaning was comparable to the similar abilities of the great Edinburgh historian, and, in many ways, to that of Voltaire, who also chronicled Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro in his sprawling account of “what the Western nations originally were,” *Essai sur les mœurs* (1753-1756).<sup>622</sup> Like Burke and Robertson, Voltaire had admiration for the “great Columbus” whose fame appeared to him “pure and unstained.” However, unlike Burke and Robertson, his interpretation of Cortés, the European explorers that followed, and the native populations they encountered was colored by his strong anti-Spanish and anti-Christian bias.<sup>623</sup> Burke referenced in the early volumes of *The Annual Register* his reading of both *Essai sur les mœurs* and the *Siècle de Louis XIV*.<sup>624</sup>

Burke was interested in the conquests of Mexico and Peru because they were transformational events for both the New and the Old World. In Voltaire’s words, the reports of voyage and discovery “taught us how inconsiderable a spot on the globe our

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<sup>622</sup> See the contemporary version *The Works of Voltaire*, notes by Tobias Smollett, translated by William F. Fleming forty-two volumes (Ohio, 1904) with his *An Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations, and on the Principal Events of History from Charlemagne to Louis XIII* comprising seven volumes, volume four considering the age of Charles V and Philip II, and including the sections on Columbus and Cortés, pp. 193-231.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.* on Columbus, pp. 206, 227; on Voltaire’s anti-Christian interpretations and consequent interest in the New World natives unfairly made to be the “prey to the powers of Christendom,” see pp. 206ff. Voltaire’s principal source appears to be las Casas who he repeatedly mentions, see pp. 207ff.

<sup>624</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1758, p. 240n; and for the *Essai* see, *The Annual Register*, 1760, pp. 176-178, and 1764, pp. 167-172.

Europe was....”<sup>625</sup> Outside Burke’s Irish context, they were the first “general revolutions” he examined, in the sense he would give that term in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* of a great or sudden change.<sup>626</sup> As William Robertson would later write, “the conquest of the two great empires of Mexico and Peru forms the most splendid and interesting period in the history of America....”<sup>627</sup> In the relevant sections of the *Settlements*, Burke surveyed the origins of the great convulsions that were the effect of the encounter between European and the Aztec and Inca civilizations with an eye to exploring obliquely the concrete implications of his own developing understanding of the nature of conquest and empire through the historical examples he puts before his readers. Moreover, Burke’s belief that instruction is a primary component of historical writing is given concrete expression, for example, in his account of Cortés’ character and the conquest of Mexico. Although hints of this approach to historical writing were evident in his Columbus sketch, his account of the subjection of a great primitive empire—the Aztec—by the great European empire of its day—Spain—is a more comprehensive vehicle for Burke to put his hand to narrative political history. It provided him with a larger canvas upon which to blend together his interest in the causal role of individuals, often unintentionally, in moving history, with his need to provide a chronological narrative structure to his larger political history. Significantly, this was the first recorded attempt of this kind that Burke was to make. He was, of course, to follow it with a somewhat more polished account of early English history; some have argued that he planned but abandoned a similar version of Irish history;<sup>628</sup> and he would put this skill to use in drafting the historical articles for the *Annual Register*. Beyond this obvious importance, the moral instruction Burke incorporated into his account of the capture and destruction of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital upon the ruins of which Cortés built Mexico City, was a means by which he could continue to work out his own ideas about the nature, progress, and origins of empire and colonial settlement.

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<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>626</sup> *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, WS, II, p. 264.

<sup>627</sup> Robertson, *History of America*, Book VIII, p. 313.

<sup>628</sup> See John C. Weston, Jr., “Edmund Burke’s Irish History: A Hypothesis,” *PMLA* 77, 1962, pp. 397-403.

## I.

Burke's account of the conquest of Mexico in the *Settlements*<sup>629</sup> focused on the characters of Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) and Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar (1465-1524), Moctezuma II<sup>630</sup> (1480-1520), and Guatimozín<sup>631</sup> (c.1502-1525). Cortés was Burke's hero, Velázquez his villain. The Aztec leader Moctezuma was an inconstant, if star-crossed, emperor of a kingdom and civilization about to be eclipsed. And Guatimozín, Moctezuma's nephew and the last Aztec emperor, was a youthful leader of "penetrating genius"<sup>632</sup> who was fated, like Burke's European conquerors, to advance large notions amid narrow minds. The conquest of Mexico must have appealed to Burke's sense of drama<sup>633</sup> as much as it fed his "furor *historicus*." In the context of a great collision of remarkable characters, Burke teased out the implications of the greater clash of civilizations on history—implicitly seeking lessons for contemporary Great Britain.

Burke began his political history with a sketch of his antagonist: "Sometime after the settlement of Cuba, Don James Velasquez obtained the government; a man of good sense in common affairs, but so much mistaken, as to imagine he could act a great part by deputy; and that too in circumstances, wherein a man who had but little capacity, could do him but little service, and he that could do much, would certainly do it for himself. The continent of America was now very well known, and the fame of the greatness and wealth of Mexican empire spread every where. This inspired Velasquez with a scheme of reducing some part of this opulent country under his obedience."<sup>634</sup>

Burke's heir to Columbus was Cortés. "There was," he thought, "no man amongst the Spaniards, who to an adventurous disposition, then common to them all, knew so well to join a cool and steady conduct, to gain love while he preserved respect; not to shift his schemes according to occasions, but persisting uniformly in a well-judged design, to make every inferior action and event subservient to it; to urge still forward; to extricate himself out of difficulties into which he was brought by bold actions, not by mean subterfuges, but by actions yet bolder."<sup>635</sup> The great adventurers, such as Columbus and

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<sup>629</sup> Burke's account of the Mexican conquest unfolds in chapters nine through fourteen of part one.

<sup>630</sup> Known popularly through history as Montezuma.

<sup>631</sup> Also known by the Nahuatl (language of the Aztec empire) name as Cuauhtémoc or Cuauhtemotzin.

<sup>632</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 97.

<sup>633</sup> Burke's early interest in drama was demonstrated by his contributions to the *Reformer* and by an early essay on drama, in *WS*, I.

<sup>634</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 69.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*

Cortés, rose above the base motivations of the court, but nevertheless were forced to pay obeisance to its dictates and bring gold back to Spain in order to purchase the confidence of their sovereign and continue their colonial enterprise.

The divergent character types represented by Cortés and Velázquez were thus destined to conflict, and they did so in dramatic fashion at the very outset of the conquest of Mexico when Cortés had to explain to his soldiers at Havana that they must disobey Velázquez and his attempts to topple Cortés.<sup>636</sup> Burke used the incident to contrast an act of heroic disobedience justified by inconstancy and jealousy of one leader, Velázquez, with the ability and honor of the other, Cortés. It is worth considering that in contemplating Cortés' character in this episode, Burke may have thought of himself when he observed that for a heroic character, "blind obedience is rarely a principal ingredient." He was, after all, at that time an insubordinate son who had refused at great personal cost to comply with his father's stubborn instruction to follow a legal career.

Cortés' political wisdom and moderation, always an important virtue for Burke, was the point of Burke's account of the Spaniard's first encounter in 1519 with an Amerindian force and their defeat of the Tlascalans, the native people of a "celebrated republic on the coast of Mexico." An alliance between the Conquistadors and the Tlascalans was the result of the battle. "Cortes, however, did not chuse to trust this untried and forced alliance too far, nor at the same time to deprive himself entirely of the succour it produced. He there took a middle course, and, accepting three thousand of their men, he held on his route to Mexico."<sup>637</sup> As with Columbus, one admirable attribute Burke saw in his approved conquerors was that they built as much or more than they destroyed, and in doing so established the foundation for the future glory and prosperity of Europe's colonies and metropolitan centers. After the Tlascalcan battle, Cortés himself made such a contribution, building a "strong fortress" on a principal port of the Mexican coast which he named Villa Rica de Vera Cruz. The name of the town, Rich Village of the True Cross, summarized the Spanish court's principal ambitions in the New World: to find gold and spread the Gospel.<sup>638</sup> This city, Burke noted, has since become

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<sup>636</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>637</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 74-75.

<sup>638</sup> See J. H. Hexter and Richard Pipes, *Europe Since 1500* (New York, 1968), p. 359.

“remarkable for the great traffic carried on between those opulent countries [of New Spain], and Old Spain.”<sup>639</sup>

With his men firmly committed to him, if not to his “extensive views,” Cortés advanced on the Aztec Empire then governed by Moctezuma. From the outset, Burke portrayed Moctezuma as “a prince of capacity and courage, but artful, hypocritical, and cruel.” In the aftermath of the Spanish arrival, the Moctezuma of the *Settlements* was more inconstant than even Velázquez, hampered as he was by a lack of resolve and determination of vision.<sup>640</sup> Burke contrasted the two leaders and articulated the basis for his admiration of Cortés; namely, that Cortés’ conquest was the result of great cunning borne of a profound understanding of man’s common human nature and his extensive study and observation of Moctezuma’s “empire.” Learning and sympathy were the basis by which Cortés would “prove his strength” and conquer an empire with “an army of no more than five hundred foot, and not quite sixty horse.”<sup>641</sup> As Burke characterized it, though Cortés had never himself set foot in the capital of Moctezuma’s empire, “He did not come a stranger into the country, to encounter a force which he dared to engage only because he was ignorant of it. He had long made every possible enquiry from the Spaniards and the Indians in every circumstance of its internal weakness or power....”<sup>642</sup>

In the research and writing of the *Settlements*, Burke was doing precisely what he commended in Cortés: studying, observing, and making “every possible enquiry” into the history, character, mores, strengths, and weaknesses of a distant people in the process of being colonized. Cortés was preparing to depart for Tenochtitlan, and was well prepared for the uncertainty of the encounter. The utility of this study for Burke was that from it he developed a valuable expertise and knowledge to be advanced in the ensuing years at the service of imperial politics. It is in this context of studying and attempting to understand the manners and mores of another people that Burke found Cortés’ mission, with its attendant difficulties, to be of enormous interest and value. Cortés’ own study in preparation for his enterprise, according to Burke, paid early dividends. He knew that many of the native tribes “were kept in a forced subjection or a slavish dread of Montezuma.” Then, underscoring a common human impulse across the divide of space

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<sup>639</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 75.

<sup>640</sup> *Settlements*, p. 71.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.



and time, Burke made a point characteristic of his notion of reform, he pointed out that the native populations then being oppressed by the Aztecs “gladly” turned to “these formidable strangers” in an effort to “shake off the ancient tyranny, which always appears the worst, without foreseeing consequences, to which more civilized nations have frequently been as blind as they.” And thus he recounted that the nations “tributary to Montezuma...gladly put themselves under the protection of Cortes.”

This much Cortés had anticipated. However, what was unexpected in the response of Moctezuma gave Burke the opportunity to sketch the character of this native emperor. In it, he emphasized the Aztec’s irresolution and thus his inferiority in character to Cortés:

Montezuma was soon made acquainted with these measures. For, according to the customs of that well-regulated kingdom, he had posts so stationed, that in a little time he had notice of whatever happened in the remote parts of his empire. The dispatches which were sent him, were painted cloaths, exactly representing every circumstance of the business of which he was to be informed; the figures were interspersed with characters to explain what must necessarily be wanting in the picture. So far, but no farther, had this people advanced in the art of writing. As well informed as the emperor was of every particular of this invasion, and of the defection of his tributaries, he acted not at all conformably to the greatness of his former exploits. He took the worst method which a great prince ever did upon such an occasion, which was, to temporize.... Cortes, like the great commander he was, took advantage of this irresolute disposition in Montezuma, and used every possible means to cherish it....<sup>643</sup>

Burke, thus, contrasted Cortés’ political wisdom and moderation to the inconstancy of Moctezuma.

In Burke’s political history the weakness of character determined the workings of history as much as strong character did. For example, Moctezuma’s “weak policy” threatened the peace of his great city and empire.<sup>644</sup> And so Cortés marched toward Mexico and found Moctezuma unprepared to meet him. Indeed, Moctezuma was forced to set upon a plan to double-cross Cortés by turning some of Cortés’ native Indian allies and gold thirsty soldiers against him. But Cortés detected the plan and acted resolutely by marching into Moctezuma’s palace to confront the emperor. Moctezuma, of course, disavowed the accusations of Cortés, who shrewdly assured him that while he was satisfied that the emperor was innocent, others among the Spaniards were not, and that to

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<sup>643</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 73-74. William Robertson’s character analysis of the Aztec prince was similar, see *History of America*, Book IV, p 204.

<sup>644</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 75-76.

“satisfy” them, “some solid proof” of Moctezuma’s confidence in them must be offered, which could only be accomplished by surrendering himself into Cortés’ custody. Moctezuma, in Burke’s account, “saw plainly that Cortes did not make so extraordinary a request but with a resolution of making it be complied with. He saw the necessity, and he yielded to it.”<sup>645</sup> “Thus,” Burke observed,

was the metropolis of a vast and powerful empire, inhabited by an innumerable multitude of warlike people, entered without resistance by an handful of men, who came to overturn its liberty. And thus was one of the greatest princes on earth, renowned for his wisdom and valour, seized in his palace, in the midst of his capital, at noonday, and carried prisoner, without noise or violence, by six persons, to be disposed of at their pleasure.<sup>646</sup>

Burke then employed mechanical language to speak of Cortés’ advantage: “Cortes, who well understood the consequence of the steps he had taken, was not alarmed. He knew that he had now, in his hands an engine, which was capable of doing any thing.”<sup>647</sup> For Cortés, Moctezuma was himself now the “engine,” the “proper motion” necessary to propel “the best form and settlement of a state.”<sup>648</sup> He was a vehicle for “invention and enterprize” that Burke argued often powered conquest. Under house arrest, Moctezuma nevertheless “contrived a scheme” to unsettle the civil order and stir an active indignation in his people. Cortés, however, being a “watchful and sagacious commander,”<sup>649</sup> quelled the instigated “general calamity.” Moctezuma’s design thus being frustrated, a “disordered” “assembly” of native subjects relented and “paid homage to Cortes, in that dumb and sullen submission with which fierce spirits yield to necessity.”<sup>650</sup> Similar to Columbus before him, Cortés was not motivated principally by the prospect of gold; however, he understood that the Spanish court was. According to Burke, “Cortes said that this empty homage secured him nothing; but he knew that the gold, which was to accompany it, would be of real service in canceling the ill impressions made by his disobedience [toward Velázquez], in Spain.”<sup>651</sup> He understood that having possession of

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<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 78-79.

<sup>646</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 79.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the Aztec emperor, his troops in position, and the natives in “terror” meant that, “In Mexico he might look upon himself as secure....”<sup>652</sup>

As events would have it, Cortés’ genius would be tested on both fronts. Moctezuma, according to Burke, “roused his dormant magnanimity,” and convinced Cortés it was in his best interests to depart the monarch’s “empire.”<sup>653</sup> Similarly, the Spanish emperor, through Cortés’ “old enemy Velasquez” approved a plan that sent Pánfilo de Narváez (1470-1528) to take command from Cortés, “to treat him as a rebel, and send him in chains to Cuba.”<sup>654</sup> It was when seemingly overwhelmed by adversity that Burke’s American characters usually demonstrated their mettle. This episode proved no exception. For as Burke flatly put it, “There never was a time wherein the firmness and capacity of this commander in chief were put so strongly to the proof.... His own courage and conduct; his soldiers, habituated to victory; and endeared to him by common dangers and triumphs; his reputation, and the signal providence which always attended him, would combat upon his side.”<sup>655</sup> Here, as in his account of Columbus, was evidence of the space Burke created in history for the operation of individual will in his “great men” of history. However throughout the *Settlements*, Burke provided accidental accounts and providential speculations about decisive turns in history. “There is a species of a splendid good fortune necessary to form a hero,” he argued, “to give a luster to his wisdom and courage, and to create that confidence and superiority in him that nothing else can give, but which always makes a principal part of an heroic character. Without this, it is impossible for any man, however qualified, to emerge.”<sup>656</sup>

Burke’s belief in the mixture of individual will and providence acting together on history’s stage was implicit in his next account of his great man. Cortés, he noted, again moved with the firmness of mind that characterized him; and, as Burke put it, “no time was to be lost in fruitless counsels.” On the contrary, his new nemesis, Narváez, was possessed of a “dilatory genius,” and thus was no match for Cortés in the field. For Cortés advanced decidedly “by forced marches.” And, too, he turned the accident of weather to his immediate advantage: “He was but a small distance from the enemy’s quarters, when the rains came on, and, as usual in that country, fell very heavily. Cortés,

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<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

knowing that the ill dispositions of the sky were circumstances favourable to a surprise, inviting to desperate enterprises, and that they are always least prejudicial to those in motion...he marched to attack the camp, on one of those gloomy and tempestuous nights.”<sup>657</sup> Though he had intelligence of this movement against him, Narváez “laughed at it.” He did not understand the “nature” of what Burke termed the “prudent rashness” of Cortés’ attempt.<sup>658</sup> Cortés fell swiftly upon Narváez’s camp, divided it, and took Narváez prisoner. After briefly regrouping and attempting a counter-assault against Cortés, Narváez’s army, which vastly outnumbered that of Cortés’, succumbed to the great man upon news of their own general’s capture. In the aftermath of this victory, Narváez’s men were “well affected to Cortes, [and] they listened at last to his proposals....”<sup>659</sup> For Burke, Providence smiled on Cortés and helped him escape a seemingly inevitable and premature end.

Moctezuma was not as fortunate. Regarding the end of the great Aztec, Burke concluded that “this noble prince” was “more remarkable for the great virtues by which he ascended the throne, and those qualities by which he held it in so much luster for many years, than for his steadiness and wisdom in defending it when attacked by a formidable enemy. It has happened thus to many great men. Burke then located in the particular life of a distant and foreign emperor a universal lesson:

It is natural whilst we are raising ourselves, and contending against difficulties, to have our minds, as it were, strung, and our faculties intent and constantly awake. The necessity of our affairs obliged us to a continual exercise of whatever talents we possess; and we have hope to animate and urge us onward. But when we are come to the summit of our desires, the mind suffers itself to relax. It is grievous to contend a-new for things, of which we have long looked upon ourselves as secure. When we have no longer any thing to hope, we have then every thing to fear. Thus enervated by this prosperity, and discomposed with this fear, we become stiff and irresolute to action; we are willing to use any temporizing measures, rather than hazard on an adventure so much power and reputation. If Montezuma had made an early use of his power, he had strength enough, after many losses, to have kept Cortes far enough from his capital; but, having once entered upon shifting and dilatory course, this brave and active enemy gave his affairs a mortal blow, by seizing his capital and his person. The rest was all a consequence, which no prudence could prevent, of a plan of conduct imprudent and ill laid originally.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

The Aztec's defeat at the hands of Spain might also have been applied to the history of conquest in the British Isles. Indeed, Burke would come to apply this lesson to Ireland and British policy toward its North American colonies. Peoples and nations, Burke believed, often become "enervated by their own prosperity." Affluent circumstances paradoxically presented a circumstance that could lead to the weakening of peoples, and thus should give pause and "everything to fear" in the enlightened leaders of such nations. However, it usually does not. Hubris and an unwillingness to challenge complacency and comfort in the face of serious challenges to such a salutary condition can, thus in Burke's analysis, lead to decline and defeat. Burke would come to see this in his understanding of how Henry II moved so easily through Ireland to conquer the Irish. And he would attribute some of the same to those promoting what he believed was a hubristic, imprudent, and self-defeating policy in North America in the years after the French and Indian War. Finally, in his treatment of the dramatic encounters of Cortés and Moctezuma, Burke may have recalled John Dryden's (1631-1700) dramas on the subject, and the literary potential Dryden mined from the lives of the Spaniard whom he viewed as always honorable and the Mexican whom he saw as classically dignified.<sup>661</sup>

At this point, another great "character" providentially arose, Guatimozín (Cuauhtémoc). A new "engine" for propelling the progress of this great encounter of civilizations, Guatimozín was positioned in the *Settlements* as a kind of Aztec version of Cortés. The nephew and son-in-law of Moctezuma, Guatimozín was, according to Burke, "a man fit to command at such a time; of a person graceful, a body strong and robust, and of a soul full of the most undaunted courage. Though no more than twenty-four years old, the reputation of his early exploits procured him the authority of age, and a penetrating genius served him for experience."<sup>662</sup> Burke contrasted Guatimozín's steadiness and constancy with the precariousness of the situation he inherited: "He was no sooner called to this unsteady throne, than he took measures to prevent the Mexicans from their disorderly and casual attacks, and to make them act with design and uniformity." This passion for order and discipline was one, as we have seen, shared by Cortés (and by extension, Burke). But importantly, and again like Cortés, it was not an arbitrary

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<sup>661</sup> Dryden's plays including substantial treatment of the clash of peoples in the New World included, *The Indian Queen* (written with Sir Robert Howard) and *The Indian Emperor* (both in 1665) and *The Conquest of Grenada* (originally published in two parts, first in 1670 and second in 1671). For Burke's familiarity with Dryden prior to writing the *Settlements*, see *Correspondence*, I, pp. 17, 30, 57, and 88.

<sup>662</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 97.



authoritarian order. It was, rather, a policy that resulted from careful study and thoughtful, even scientific, consideration of the nature and needs of the moment. Guatimozín had the attributes Burke appreciated in those charged with great responsibility: the capacity to take “extended views” in a highly fraught situation. Burke observed how he took stock of the Aztec’s previous failed policies and determined to reverse them. He resolved to avoid open warfare and instead focused on cutting off streets and causeways in order to starve the Europeans. Such a measure, Burke posited, “shewed no small sagacity in Guatimozin, because it was what had never been before practiced amongst the military stratagems of this people, and invention is characteristic of genius.”

Burke once again located a characteristic universal to human nature, the application of rationality to improve and/or advance the material dimension of humankind, in a particular circumstance and person. The significance of this passage is that Burke found in an Indian “other” the intellectual equivalent of a European hero. Burke believed that “extraordinary” individuals were generally the agents of cultural advance. In this case Burke focused on the example of military progress. In all peoples, important social improvements of whatever kind stemmed from the ability of one or more individuals to see a little farther beyond the conventionally accepted horizon; and consequently in Burke’s view of the progress of mankind once the improvement or “invention” was made, it became a means for wider cultural progress and itself became a building block awaiting the next innovation. In the context of this clash of empires, Burke surveyed in these chapters, one important, and for his readers subtle and perhaps unexpected, theme: European settlers shared more in common with the native populations than they generally appreciated.

Burke reinforced this point in his movement from the new Aztec monarch to Cortés. Having just celebrated the rational calculations of Guatimozín, he suggested that Cortés’ next move was based on superstition. With Guatimozín regrouping and bringing new resolve and order to his army, Cortés was once again forced to retreat from the city. Rather than applying his genius in the form of rational calculations, Cortés turned to “a sort of astrologer, who passed for a prophet” to make a decision his war counsel was unable to agree upon. From there Burke gave the following account:

Certain it is, that when measures are dubious, superstitious determinations have great use; for as reason cannot easily determine the right way, that method

which superstition fixes upon is, by the weight it has from thence, pursued with the greater cheerfulness and effect. The general was guided by the prophet....”<sup>663</sup>

In the space of little more than two pages, Burke provided one sketch of a great people being organized and improved by a scientific approach, and another sketch of a great people re-organizing and preparing for the future under the guidance of an “astrologer.” The irony, of course, was that it is the native Aztecs, under the guidance of their new leader, who pursued the “enlightened” approach while the “method” which the Europeans appealed to is “superstition.” Here Burke may have been suggesting both that on a surface level sixteenth-century Europeans were much closer to their Aztec contemporaries than to enlightened Europeans of the eighteenth century; while on a deeper level reflective members of eighteenth-century European civilization would do well to consider that its relative advancement may well be a veneer that could be easily stripped away when complacency meets with crisis, and more primordial instincts begin to resurface.

At the outset of the next chapter, Burke reviewed the ways in which experience and memory guided Guatimozin’s moves. The new Aztec emperor learned from Moctezuma’s errors, and thus quickly “ordered the city to be fortified in such a manner as to secure himself against their entrance for a third time.” At the Battle of Otumba (1520), he had inflicted upon the Spaniards “the greatest loss they had yet in America,” and he attempted through the technique of “dread”—once used so effectively by Cortés himself—to secure the affections and loyalty of his subjects and his allies: “He cut off the heads of the [dead] Spaniards, and of their horses, no less dreaded, and sent them to all the neighboring nations, as an infallible token of this victory; as a sure proof that he was resolved to keep no measures with the enemy, and to stir them up to their utter destruction.” This was, as we have seen, an aesthetic dimension of this encounter of civilizations that fascinated Burke, a theory of which he was at that time also working on and would, of course, eventually publish as his treatise on the sublime and beautiful. As Burke would have predicated on the basis of his political aesthetics, Guatimozin

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<sup>663</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 98-99.

“succeeded so well, that numberless petty nations, well inclined to the Spaniards, fell off and many that were wavering were confirmed in the Mexican interest.”<sup>664</sup>

Burke, much like Robertson, did not shy away from depicting the unrelenting cruelty that so often characterized the Spanish treatment of the Amerindian during this siege and conquest. However, Burke believed that the degree of brutality was often exaggerated by Spain’s political enemies, “that the accounts are by no means founded upon any tolerable methods of calculation....” In particular, he went out of his way to exonerate the Catholic clergy from the admittedly widespread oppression of the Amerindians. “There is,” he noted, “a notion likewise pretty common, that these cruelties were committed partly, if not wholly, upon a religious account, and at the instigation of the priests; but in reality, it was quite otherwise. This unfortunate people found their only refuge in the humanity which yet remained in the clergy.... But of any murders committed by them, or at their instigation, I find little or no proof at all.”<sup>665</sup>

There is a suggestive parallel to this defense in Burke’s writings: the Irish Rebellion of 1641. This was a historic episode with current, indeed lifelong, meaning to Burke. It was to him an example of the way in which the exaggeration or fabrication of historical facts could be used to demonize a people. In this case Spain and their Catholic clergy were the objects of such demonization; while it was the old Irish and their Catholic clergy that got the blame for the excesses of the 1641 uprising. Burke would have seen the same spirit animating the characterizations of both episodes, and he sought through a cooler presentation of the historical record to unsettle what had become popularly received notions. The conquest of Mexico and Peru are examples of Burke’s historical method of concentrating on key historical events.

At the end of his history of the first conquest in North America Burke summarized the fates of the captains of the conquering and conquered parties. Guatimozín, he informed, was captured and offered himself peacefully in exchange for the security of his family. His “constancy” was admired by all the Spaniards, and with his capture “The ruins of the city of Mexico were now delivered up to the Spaniards. With it fell that empire, and the liberty of all the Indian nations, which filled that vast country now called New Spain....”<sup>666</sup> While Cortés was near, his authority was enough to secure for the

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<sup>664</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 105-106.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>666</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 124.

captive emperor “the treatment...such as fitted an unfortunate brave man....”

Regrettably, the new problems soon to be dominant in the New World were evidenced early by the manner in which Guatimozín came to his end. As Burke put it, “the infernal avarice” of Cortés’ troops caused them to suspect that immense treasure was being hidden from them. One among the number of these “villains” “seized upon him [the captive emperor], and proceeding to the most abominable cruelty, laid him upon burning coals to extort a discovery of his wealth....” The false basis of their avarice meant that their lust for Indian plunder would remain unfulfilled until some future day. In the meantime, Burke believed that this indignity was not perpetrated by his “hero;” rather, he argued, “This wickedness was committed without the knowledge of Cortes. He was no sooner apprised of what was doing, than he rushed in upon the villains, and rescued their prey, mangled as it was, from their further fury.... Cortes, being obliged to submit the humanity of his nature to the cruel necessity of politics, ordered him to be executed.”<sup>667</sup>

Having fulfilled his heroic destiny, Cortés exited meekly from Burke’s stage: “As for Cortes himself, neither his great success, nor the vast treasures which he sent into Spain, could secure him from his enemies; by whose unwearied zeal for his ruin, he saw himself superseded in the government of a country, conquered by himself with so much toil and danger, and which in any other hands had never been effected. He died in Spain, having received a title and some other rewards from Charles the Vth, for whom he had acquired an empire; but by his own desire he was carried to Mexico, and buried there.”<sup>668</sup> Cortés’ end, like so many of Burke’s heroes, thus included an element of tragedy. In fact, it seemed that for Burke, tragic ends were more often than not the fate of the world historical figure—to change history, but to be one of the pale unsatisfied ones who cannot know contentment in their own time.

Beyond that consideration, through historical illustration Burke expressed in his narrative of Cortés’ encounter with the Aztec empire, and the multi-character sketches embedded in it, his view of the complicated relations that necessarily exist between conquered peoples and their conquerors, and between historical causation, Providence, and the unintended consequences that often follow upon human action. In his narrative, there was equality at the level of the ruling elites ~~the~~ he saw in both the Europeans and

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<sup>667</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 124-126.

<sup>668</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 126.

the Aztecs. Their likeness was borne of circumstance experienced by colonial native and intruder alike, the “uncivilized” and the “civilized,” as in a kind of blindness they initiated a civilizational process the consequences of which was yet to be known, but the outcome of which would affect the future of each “world.” Burke’s view of Providence shaped his own interpretation of such encounters and his assessment of its consequences. But the greatness of his man of “comprehensive views”—here given flesh in the person of Cortés—is in large part determined by his ability perceive the movement of Providence, seize on the unexpected opportunity, and generally conform his actions and ambitions to advancing the spirit of an age. Such singular ability was gained largely through study, observation, and the cultivation of a sympathy rooted in an appreciation of human nature across different and complex cultures. Burke found it wanting at the outset of his next compact historical narrative.

## II.

Burke’s account of the first European conquests, which transformed both the New and Old worlds, moved next to South America and the conquest of another “civilized kingdom,”<sup>669</sup> the Inca Empire of Peru. Burke focused on the “schemes” and “characters” of Francisco Pizarro (c.1475-1541), Diego de Almagro (1475-1538), and Hernando de Luque (d. 1534), the principals who undertook the conquest of Peru. As in his account of the conquest of Mexico, Burke heightened the drama by contrasting opposing “conquerors.” The contrast between a policy of conquest animated by self-interest and that founded upon disinterestedness was strikingly drawn. Pizarro was cast as conquering villain, while Almagro was portrayed as a semi-tragic character of basically good intentions, if not particularly farsighted or perceptive. Luque was a disreputable priest.

One of the more remarkable parts of Burke’s political history of the conquest of Peru was his reflection on Atahualpa, or Atabalipa (c.1502-1533), and the Inca people. As Burke had considered previously the character of Moctezuma and Guatimozín and their empire in Mexico, in this account he sympathetically portrayed the character of the Inca Kings, briefly the first Inca king, Manco Capac (d. 1230), and then at greater length his descendent Atabalipa. At the same time, on a larger canvas, Burke also drew a character of the Peruvian peoples:

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<sup>669</sup> *Settlements*, p. 129.



The empire of Peru was governed by a race of kings, which they called yncas. The twelfth in succession was then upon the throne. The first of this race, named Manco Capac, was a prince of great genius, with that mixture of enthusiasm, which fits a man to make great changes, and to be the legislator of a forming nation. He observed that the people of Peru were naturally superstitious, and had principally a veneration for the sun. He therefore pretended that he was descended from that luminary, whose authority he was designed to bear, and whose worship he was by that authority to enforce. By this persuasion, easily received by a credulous people, he brought a large territory under his jurisdiction; a larger was subdued by his arms; but he made use both of the deceit and the force for the most laudable purposes. He united and civilized the dispersed and barbarous people: he bent them to laws and arts; he softened them by the institutions of a benevolent religion; in short, there was no part of America in which agriculture and the arts were so much and so well cultivated, nor where the people were of a milder nature, and more ingenuous manners. The yncas, descended, as they imagined, from so sacred an original, were themselves respected as divinities. In none, even of the Asiatic countries, was there so entire an obedience to the royal authority. But here it was rather filial than slavish. As to the character of the Peruvians themselves, they seem to have had a strong resemblance to the ancient Egyptians: like them, under a sky constantly serene, they were a people industrious and ingenious; cultivating the arts, but without bringing them to perfection; inclined to superstition, and of a soft unwarlike temper.<sup>670</sup>

In describing the first encounter between Inca Peru and Christian Spain, Burke empathized with the Peruvian Incas and evidenced a real admiration for their civilization. Pizarro and his marauders were generally ignorant of any such attainment. As mentioned above, Pizarro had no formal education, and thus was himself, in an important sense, more of a barbarian than those Peruvians for whom he was to demonstrate so much contempt. Unlike Cortés, Pizarro had neither the ability nor the interest to assess the character of the people he came to conquer. Furthermore, the Christian missionaries did not, in this case, distinguish themselves either. Indeed, the inherent nobility and generosity of the Incas, which in large part flowed from their religious cult, was set in stark relief to the Christian conquerors of Peru.

In Burke's use of comparative history he made the point to his contemporary readers that barbarism and civility can often be in the eyes of the beholder; and that ignorance and intolerance—and the savage cruelty and injustice that usually accompanied them—was as much, or more, a part of Christian Europe than of the savage peoples of the Americas. Burke's narrative was powerful in this regard and merits extended quotation:

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<sup>670</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 133-134.

Atabalipa, newly seated upon a precarious throne, was not the least alarmed [at the arrival of the Spaniards]; for a new-erected power has every thing to fear from whatever sets the people's minds, still unsettled, upon a new motion. He resolved, if possible, that his enemies should take no advantage of the arrival of those strangers, by engaging them by all means to his own interest. He therefore received the ambassadors, which Pizarro had sent, with the greatest marks of honour, though their discourse, consisting itself of very impertinent matter, was very ill interpreted to him, as was his to them. He even went out to meet Pizarro with a vast number of attendants, to whom he gave the strictest charge upon no account to offer the least injury to the strangers.... But Pizarro, who advanced with other notions to the interview, soon convinced him that a contrary caution was more necessary. They met near a celebrated temple, the Spaniards drawn up in order of battle, and a party in ambuscade. This circumstance leaves us in no doubt as to the design of Pizarro. The first person who addressed himself to the ynca, was father Vincent<sup>671</sup>, a friar, who was not ashamed to make his character the instrument of so base a crime. He advanced with a cross in his hand, and began a most unseasonable discourse upon the birth and miracles of Christ, exhorting him to become a Christian, on the pain of eternal punishment. The ynca...behaved with decency and gravity, telling him, that he believed that he and his companions were children of the sun; recommended himself and his subjects to their protection; and made no doubt but they would behave to them in a manner worthy the offspring of so beneficent a deity... A disturbance ensued [and] the ynca...was dragged down, and made a prisoner, by an act of the most unparalleled treachery, executed with a cruelty that has hardly an example, and can admit of no excuse. The plunder of his camp, rich beyond the idea of any European of that time, was their reward.<sup>672</sup>

Burke's last sentence, while putting before contemporary English readers the historical truth of having begun a European settlement in South America through betrayal, savage murder, rank iconoclasm, and grand larceny, also highlights a tension within Burke's own understanding of colonialism. Typically, Burke believed it best to draw a veil upon the origins of prevailing regimes, which he understood are usually achieved through violence that in other circumstances was considered unsavory or unjust by the inheritors of the ruling establishment.

Burke's dilemma was that since the spread of Christian European "civilization" seemed to conform to a mysterious providential design,<sup>673</sup> it was right to encourage it and to establish incentives for it. However, man's nature being horribly flawed, the dreams of

<sup>671</sup> Vicente de Valverde (1490-1543) was a Spanish bishop and a Dominican friar, notorious for enslaving and otherwise oppressing the native Peruvians.

<sup>672</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 136-138. Robertson had a very similar and respectful depiction of Atabalipa, and a vivid account of Pizarro's seizure of the Inca leader, in *History of America*, Book VI, pp. 269-277.

<sup>673</sup> "There seems to be a remarkable providence in casting the parts, if I may use that expression, of the several European nations who act upon the stage of America." *Settlements*, pp. 57-58.

avarice coupled with a lack of a broad, liberal learning put the European colonial enterprise at terrible risk of projecting a vicious barbarism into the unknown regions of the New World, and deprive both parties of the advantages that might be derived from another sort of conquest, based on justice and disinterested pursuit of the good for all parties. This “other sort of conquest” led Burke to put an absolute priority on the character and quality of those responsible for carrying Christian and European notions of civilization into the uncharted regions and to the native peoples of the Americas. The absence of this in the initial conquest of Peru gave Burke an incident in history where the lack of a leader of “comprehensive views” resulted in the projection of European vice, rather than virtue, in the new settlements; which vice—principally greed and lust for power—was, in turn, used to entice new, fresh recruits to pursue an ignoble path of colonialism. Rather, in Amerindian characters such as Atabalipa, Burke found much evidence of sophisticated reasoning, and was able to juxtapose “enlightened” Indian leaders with benighted European ones:

In the mean time, the unfortunate Atabalipa...endeavored to take advantage of his captivity, to know the genius and manners of this people. Amongst all their accomplishments, there was nothing he so much admired as the art of reading and writing. This appeared almost incomprehensible to him, though he saw clearly the use of it. He was at a loss to know whether he should consider it as a natural endowment, or as an acquisition of art. To discover this, he one day desired a soldier to write the name of God upon his nail; he carried this about the army, desiring several to explain it, which they all did, to his wonder and satisfaction. At last he shewed it to Pizarro, but Pizarro blushed, and could make nothing of it. The ynca then perceived it was not natural gift, but owing to education; the want of which he thus discovered in Pizarro, and slighted him for it. This mortified the general, and his disgust, joined to his natural cruelty and a policy he thought he saw in the proceeding, made him hasten the fate he had some time before determined for his unhappy prisoner. That nothing might be wanting to the boldness and atrociousness of their barbarity, they proceeded against him by way of trial and by the forms of law.<sup>674</sup>

Burke’s contrast of the Europeans “admiring” and thirsting for Inca gold with the Inca prince admiring more the “art” of reading and writing thus effectively made his case that civilization was not the private property of Europeans. The learning acquired by Burke and displayed in the *Settlements* was itself an act of modeling how a classical education can lead to a more “enlightened” advance of mankind throughout the world. However, it ironically also highlighted one way in which Burke can be contrasted with

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<sup>674</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 142-143.

the dominant “enlightenment” tendency. For in his accounts of the conquest of Mexico and Peru, and of the character of the conquerors and conquered peoples, Burke demonstrated that linear “progress” was not a historical inevitability. Quite to the contrary; the truth for Burke seemed to be that progress and regress are inextricably bound up with each other, at the same time and in the same people. And that neatly defined historical epochs or ages ever advancing from darkness to light, the next more progressive than the latter, was a superstition.

With the exit of Pizarro and Almagro Burke introduced their successors, whose approach to settlement was in fact notable for their humanity, largeness of spirit, righteous strength, and comprehensiveness of vision. These were the Spanish colonial administrator Cristóbal Vaca de Castro (c.1492-1566) and the Spanish Bishop and diplomat Pedro de la Gasca (1485-1567). Like Fortinbras at the end of *Hamlet* or Malcolm at the end of *Macbeth*, this tragedy ended when a new generation of colonial leadership emerged in Peru. Their arrival was a hopeful sign for the prospects of a more “enlightened” European settlement in America.

Burke began by recounting the arrival of Vaca de Castro, whose appearance coincided with a volatile transition of leadership to Almagro’s twenty year-old son of the same name who had been appointed governor. For Burke, de Castro heralded a “new language” of disinterested justice a corresponding new dawn for Peru. For de Castro was “by profession a lawyer” who held to “a more rigid adherence to the strictest idea of right and justice than is suitable to the coarseness of practice” and as a result “did not make that figure in his profession to which his great capacity entitled him.” However, “what kept him backward at the bar, recommended him first to the knowledge, and afterwards to the esteem, of his master the emperor Charles the Vth....” Burke was struck by this character, “who was a lawyer without exercising the trade of law, and lived at court without being a courtier.”<sup>675</sup> It was de Castro’s native nobility, his naturally aristocratic manner, and not “any recommendation from a minister or favourite...[that] placed him in an employment of so great a trust.” Crucial for Burke, de Castro was not spoiled by his success:

When he arrived in the Indies, he still preserved his character. He acted like one who came neither to acquire friends nor fortune, but solely to do his duty; and he shewed favour or disapprobation to all in proportion as they performed their’s.

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<sup>675</sup> Could well be a description of Burke’s own sense of himself.

Indian or Spaniard was entirely alike to the equality of his justice. He flattered nobody, he threatened nobody; and, whilst he lived with all the modesty of a private man, he supported all the dignity of a governor.

Setting himself up as the new governor of Peru, and sent by Charles V to restore order between the factions of Pizarro and the Almagro after the assassination of the latter, Vaca de Castro defeated Almagro's son in 1542 and "found it necessary" to make "numerous executions" (including the younger Almagro and his followers). Burke argued that,

The severity of this procedure, whilst it terrified every body, drew no odium upon the governor, who acted clearly and without prejudice or self-interest. They looked on these executions like judgments from heaven, which afflict us bitterly, but leave no room for murmur or complaint against the hand that inflicts them... [H]e proceed with such constancy, that the Spaniards were reduced to an entire subjection, and the Indians treated by them as fellow-subjects and fellow-creatures. The clergy he made to attend diligently to the duty of their function, and to the conversion of the Indians, rather than to the acquisition of their gold. He modeled the administration of justice in the exactest manner. He founded several towns, and established schools and colleges in them, and placed the royal revenues on such a footing, that the conquest of Peru became immediately a great public advantage, which formerly was little more than an object of private plunder. But, whilst he remained himself poor among some of the richest confiscations that ever were made, and whilst he enriched the royal treasury with most prodigious remittances, the great men at court received no presents. This induced them to get a number of judges appointed, whose authority overruled that of Castro. The end was answered.<sup>676</sup>

Burke's "character" sketch of Vaca de Castro revealed again the qualities and virtues central to his ideal colonial settler and/or governor. Namely, proceeding with "constancy"; acting without "prejudice or self-interest"; giving the native Indians the due that the dignity of our common human nature requires, and so treating them "as fellow-subjects and fellow-creatures"; reforming the clergy according to their "function"; securing "the administration of justice in the exactest manner"; founding schools to diffuse education; putting the treasury on solid "footing" for the "public advantage" not "private plunder"; and providing a personal example to all by "remaining poor" when opulence tempted and riches awaited "confiscations"; and finally, stopping the practice of court bribery that was a cause for so much colonial corruption, misrule, and violence.

Burke's admiration for Vaca de Castro, and for Gasca, is palpable in these pages of the *Settlements*. It is the kind of fulsome and unreserved admiration for virtuous

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<sup>676</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 159-162.



leadership that foreshadows his more obviously personal adulation of Lord Rockingham. Even so, Burke was well aware that near the figure of virtue often lurks the darker shadow of human nature awaiting an opportunity to escape it. And so with a kind of historical or providential resignation, he recounted the manner in which Vaca de Castro's resolute and principled leadership did not go unpunished by those "courtiers" at the imperial center whose passion for colonial expansion was governed by self-interest and greed. (Again, this is a thesis in embryo that he would develop in his early political career in criticizing the king and the "king's friends," largely in reference to American affairs, and systematically set forth in his influential 1770 pamphlet *Thoughts on the Cause of Our Present Discontents*.) "Disputes arose," Burke continued, "the colony was unsettled; appeals and complaints innumerable came home and presents from all sides. But what answered the present end of the courtiers, as near stopping up the spring of bribery for the future. In the confusion that arose, from such clashing of jurisdictions and the schemes of men intent upon their own interests, it was not hard for Gonzalo, the brother of the famous Pizarro, to avail himself of the general discontent and to set himself at the head of a party." The jealous infighting and squabbling at court for the spoils of Peruvian plunder comprised Vaca de Castro's achievement; "now no longer a dispute between governors about the bounds of their jurisdictions; Gonzalo Pizarro only paid a nominal submission to the emperor. He strengthened daily, and even went so far as to behead a vice-roy<sup>677</sup> who was sent to curb him." Through a cunning worthy of his name, this Pizarro thwarted a fleet of Mexico, preventing a counter-attack from that direction, and "even entertained hopes of gaining the Spaniards in that kingdom to join in his revolt."<sup>678</sup>

Vaca de Castro's successor, Pedro de Gasca, was in every way his complement, and was the subject of Burke's last character sketch relating to the conquest of Peru.<sup>679</sup> Burke captured the same character traits of his subject, extended a similar analysis of his action, and demonstrated the same admiration and respect that Robertson would present two

<sup>677</sup> Blasco Núñez de Vela, (d. 1546).

<sup>678</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 162-163. It is worth noting that William Robertson ended his formal *History of America* with a long and admiring sketch of Gasca, who he described as a romantic figure, a priest of no high station possessed of a "gentle and insinuating temper, accompanied with much firmness; probity, superior to any feeling of private interest; and a cautious circumspection in concerting measures, followed by such vigour in executing them as is rarely found in alliances with the other. These qualities marked him out for the function to which he was destined." He approved of Gasca's "disinterested moderation," "disinterested sentiments," and "disinterested merit." *History of America*, Book VI, p. 304-312.

<sup>679</sup> After reading the *Settlements*, James Boswell noted he found the sketch of Gasca particularly admirable. Cited in Lock, *Edmund Burke*, p. 139.

decades later. In each case, their readers might have been surprised by such unqualified esteem for a Roman Catholic priest of Spain. As Burke argued, Gasca was different from Castro only

by being of a milder and more insinuating behaviour; but with the same love of justice, the same greatness of soul, and the same disinterested spirit.... When he arrived in Mexico, he declared that his was a peaceable profession; that he came not to exercise severities, but to heal by gentle measures the effects of those which were formerly exercised.... The new governor, having by necessary severities quieted his province, took effectual care to heal its disorders by the arts of peace, and to complete what Castro had been obliged to leave unfinished. He settled the civil government, the army, and the mines, upon such a basis as made the province worthy to be plundered by future vice-roys. He carried two millions to the royal treasury, paid all his debts, and sate down as poor in Spain as he had left it.<sup>680</sup>

Burke thus concluded this section of the *Settlements* with a concentrated chronicle of two men distinguished by their “comprehensive views” and “greatness of soul.” Burke’s benchmark was obviously high for any standard bearer of European colonialism in the New World. Recognizing that order was the first need, Burke emphasized the absolute necessity for colonial leaders at home and in a colonized land to be constant in their virtue and their vision, and ruthless only when necessary and then only upon those who deviate from this ideal in pursuit of an unhealthy and destructive self-interest. This, for Burke, was not an impossible standard to attain. His list of colonial characters showed that providentially, men possessed of such character have arisen to accept this challenge, and in so doing brought great credit to mankind and the settlements they founded or governed. However, he also demonstrated that there were plentiful examples of men of contrary character who, in plundering the New World and committing unspeakable crimes, disgraced themselves, their countries, and their religion and left a legacy of blood and intolerance the effect of which was felt by future generations of native inhabitants as well as European settlers. In a review of William Robertson’s *History of America* in the *Annual Register*, twenty years after he published the *Settlements*, Burke illustrated this early concern with regard to Pizarro’s ruthless extermination of the Peruvian natives:

These inhuman subverters of the Empire of the Incas, destitute of the genius and greatness of mind of Cortes, exceeded him so far in cruelty, that their barbarous actions, if they cannot lessen the enormity, at least take away from the effect produced by the recital of the worst parts of his conduct. These cruelties appear

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<sup>680</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 163-165.

the more lamentable, as the manners, disposition, government, the civil and religious institutions of the Peruvians, were moderate, mild, equitable; far removed from the harshness of government, fierceness of disposition, gloomy superstitions, and bloody rites of the Mexicans.<sup>681</sup>

All of this complexity, which he demonstrated through his character sketches, was inherent in the history and practice of colonialism. It was what Burke had in mind when he spoke throughout the *Settlements* and in his later, more famous, writings on America (and India and Ireland, too, for that matter), of the absolute necessity for the English to establish proper colonial “management,” “regulation,” “policy,” and leadership.

This insistence was the great reservoir or spring of sympathy that Burke brought to the American rebellion and to his understanding of the character of the American colonists in the 1760s and 1770s. It was the source for his passion that a moderate course should be followed in response to American complaints, that great pains must be taken to understand and situate the British colonies and their inhabitants within the Empire. It was also the basis for his predictions that the Empire will be lost if magnanimous policies are not pursued and the excessive pursuit of individual or national self-interest restrained. Of course, upon entering Parliament Burke had to compromise; his passion and policy had of necessity to be reconciled to the interests of the Rockingham Party. Still, Burke’s American models and the “map of mankind” he developed in the *Account of the European Settlements in America* permanently informed his understanding of the complex nature of conquest and colonialism. He would later draw on it to shape the political course of his own party. Consequently, Burke’s study of the Americas helped to direct his thoughts to the challenges and possibilities that existed to create an enlightened imperial structure that was humane and, as much as possible, beneficial to all parties.

Here again one finds evidence of Burke’s sympathy for the native peoples’ plight. It was rooted deeply in a sense of their full humanity. They were not only savages in the specific sense of that term as it was used in the eighteenth century—wanderers unable or unwilling to associate civilly. For Burke, “they” were “us,” and so deserved humane treatment. Through them, he believed, his contemporaries could see their past and themselves as they might have been in the youth of their civilization. Hence, their present

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<sup>681</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1777, p. 218. For an interesting modern validation of Burke’s view of the Inca Empire, its distinction from the Mexican Aztecs, and its encounters with Spain see John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (New York, 1970).

and our past might combine to instruct and to assist the contemporary European world in its maturity perhaps to avoid some of the injustices and mistaken policies that plagued the Old World. The basis for Burke's sympathetic learning, "that noble faculty whereby man is able to live in the past and in the future, in the distant and in the unreal,"<sup>682</sup> which Macaulay and so many others since Burke's time admired, was Ireland. Irish history and his own experience with the Nagles (and Shackletons) combined with his natural gifts to fashion a sensibility and an understanding, on their own terms, of the plight of oppressed majorities by colonizing minorities. He could enter so successfully into the mind and culture of the Amerindian and feel their humanity in large part because of the impact of England's colonizing experiments in Ireland that he felt personally, which was not, in Macaulay's formulation, "unreal" but rather very real.<sup>683</sup> Indeed, the *rhetoric* of England's conquest, as argued in chapter one, regarding the nature of the Irish people was as important as its political, economic, and religious legacy. For along with the Norman and then Tudor/Elizabethan political and cultural conquest of Ireland, there was an equally, if not more, significant British "construction" of the nature of the Irish people as alternatively or together "wild," "ignorant," "uncivilized," "savage," and the like. The native Amerindians were similarly constructed by the British, but not by Burke.<sup>684</sup>

Beyond Mexico and Peru, Burke included an appreciative narrative of the contributions that the Jesuits had made to settling the interior of South America. In particular, he focused on the salutary benefits of their missionary work in Paraguay. The Jesuits at this time were a controversial order, and, in the years just after publication of Burke's *Settlements*, would be suppressed in many European countries and expelled from their colonial settlements. In *Candide* (1759), for example, Voltaire had the title character make a visit to the Jesuit settlement in Paraguay and portrayed "los Padres" and the "Reverend Father Provincial" as worldly and perverted.<sup>685</sup> Accusations that Burke had been among the many Irish trained at the Jesuit seminary of St. Omer's in France, and

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<sup>682</sup> Macaulay's *Miscellaneous Writings*, "Warren Hastings," pp. 632-633

<sup>683</sup> Such an "inborn" feeling and sensibility are evident throughout his writings, consider one example from the *Reflections*: "I must think, that such treatment of any human creatures must be shocking to any but those who are made for accomplishing Revolutions. But I cannot stop here. Influenced by the inborn feelings of my nature...I confess to you, Sir, that the exalted rank of the persons suffering...instead of being a subject of exultation, adds not a little to my sensibility on that most melancholy occasion." *WS*, VIII, p. 125

<sup>684</sup> See Canny, "The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America," *op. cit.*

<sup>685</sup> Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, (1759), chapters XIV & XV, trans. Robert Pearson (Oxford World's Classics, 2006), pp. 31-36.

was thus himself a closet Jesuit, dogged him throughout his life. For instance, during a Parliamentary dispute in 1770, Sir William Bagot denounced Burke as a “black Jesuit...fit to be secretary to an inquisition.”<sup>686</sup> As an anonymous and otherwise virtually unknown writer in the mid-1750s, Burke could include such an overtly favorable account of Jesuit activity in the Americas in his, *Account of the European Settlements*. As his fame grew in the ensuing decades, however, he did not enjoy the luxury of such unequivocal admiration, nor was it even prudent for him to acknowledge his youthful praise.

The Jesuits arrived in Paraguay in 1550 and began their missionary work among the Guaraní Indians as part of the larger Spanish settlement policy of *reducciones de Indios* or “reductions.”<sup>687</sup> These Jesuit “reductions” were principally aimed at converting, civilizing, and educating the native population according to the standards of Spanish Catholicism. They were successful in that the Guaraní became a literate people. Beyond that achievement, the Jesuits in Paraguay were credited with protecting the Guaraní from capture and exploitation by European slave traders in exchange for their sending tribute, largely the work of Amerindian skilled craftsmen, to the Spanish monarch. Despite the aggressively secular and anti-Christian biases that characterized the Enlightenment, Burke had high regard for the Jesuit work in South America, and hailed “that extraordinary species of commonwealth which the Jesuits have erected in the interior parts [of the continent].”<sup>688</sup>

Burke began by remarking on the Jesuit’s persuasive criticism of the Spanish glory seekers, whose “immorality” and “insolent behavior” had scandalized and angered the native Amerindian populations. The Jesuits argued that, “if it were not for that impediment, the empire of the gospel might, by their labors, have been extended into the most unknown parts of America; and that all those countries might be subdued to his catholic majesty’s obedience, without expense and without force.” The Spanish court responded by granting the Jesuits the interior of Paraguay along with “an uncontrolled

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<sup>686</sup> William Burke to William Dennis, 3, 6 April 1770, *Correspondence*, II, p. 128.

<sup>687</sup> For the best contemporary scholarly account of the encounter between the Jesuits and the Guaraní of Paraguay, see Barbara Ganson, *The Guaraní Under Spanish Rule in the Río de La Plata* (Stanford, 2003). Although “reducciones” literally translates as “reductions,” in Spanish America “reducción” had a special meaning. It was the name the Spanish applied to a settlement of natives who had converted to Christianity. So as a matter of policy “reducciones” would have meant something closer to “conversion” of the Indians than the more literal “reduction” or “decrease” of the Indians.

<sup>688</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 278-288.



liberty...within these limits.” The Jesuits, “on their part, agreed to pay a certain capitation tax in proportion to their flock....”<sup>689</sup> The beginnings of Burke’s Jesuit narrative followed:

On these terms, the Jesuits entered upon the scene of action, and opened their spiritual campaign. They began by gathering together about fifty wandering families, whom they persuaded to settle; and they united them into a little township. This was the slight foundation upon which they have built a superstructure, which has amazed the world, and added so much power, at the same time that it has brought so much envy and jealousy, to their society. For when they had made this beginning, they labored with such indefatigable pains, and with such masterly policy, that, by degrees, they mollified the minds of the most savage nations; fixed the most rambling; and subdued the most averse to government. They prevailed upon thousands of various dispersed tribes of people to embrace their religion, and to submit to their religion, and to submit to their government; and when they had submitted, the Jesuits left nothing undone, that could conduce to their remaining in this subjection, or that could tend to increase their number to the degree required for a well-ordered and potent society; and their labors were attended with success.

It is said, that, from such inconsiderate beginnings, several years ago, their subjects amounted to three hundred thousand families. They lived in towns; they were regularly clad; they labored in agriculture; they exercised manufactures. Some even aspired to the elegant arts. They were instructed in the military with the most exact discipline; and could raise sixty thousand men well armed. To effect these purposes, from time to time, they brought over from Europe several handicraftsmen, musicians, and painters. These, I am told, were principally from Germany and Italy.

We are far from being able to trace, with the exactness they deserve, all the steps which were taken in the accomplishment of so extraordinary a conquest over the bodies and minds of so many people, without arms or violence, and differently from the methods of all other conquests; not by cutting off a large part of the inhabitants to secure the rest, but by multiplying their people, whilst they extended their territory....<sup>690</sup>

Nothing can equal the obedience of the people of these millions, except their contentment under it. Far from murmuring, that they have only necessities of life, by a labor which might in some degree procure them the conveniences of it, they think themselves a distinguished and favored people in wanting them; and they believe their obedience a duty, that not only secures their order and repose in this world, but the very best means of infusing their happiness in the next....

Burke’s admiration for the Jesuit enterprise is palpable. His respect for their prudent ability to persuade through affection rather than to conquer by force arose because it was so unlike any other interaction between peoples of a different culture that he had ever

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<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 278-279.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-281.

read about or experienced. He was familiar with the horrific tales of inhumane persecution by both Europeans and Amerindians, not to mention the English oppression of Ireland. The mutual esteem that these two different peoples and cultures seemed to feel for one another was as astonishing to Burke as it was hopeful. Such social harmony and ordered liberty led to an increased population, the mastery of many practical arts, and a flourishing commerce. This is as Burke would have predicted given his equation of peaceful coexistence with consent in governance and commercial achievement. In addition, Burke's awareness of the connection between liberty and order found confirmation in the Jesuit demonstration through their mission in Paraguay that order in the soul leads to order in society, "in this world, [and] in the next."<sup>691</sup>

Burke, however, well understood that controversy followed from any Jesuit success, and so admitted that he was "sensible, that many have represented the conduct of the Jesuits in this mission in a very bad light; but their reflections appear to me not at all supported by the facts upon which they build them." He might have been "sensible" to such historiographic distortions given his great awareness of similar distortions regarding the Irish Rebellion of 1641. And so in this case, Burke urged his readers to consider the Jesuit enterprise and the results of it in comparative terms: "To judge perfectly of the service they have done their people, we must not consider them in a parallel with the flourishing nations of Europe, but as compared with their neighbors, the savages of South America, or with the state of those Indians who groan under the Spanish yoke. Considering it in this, which is the true light, it will appear, that human society is infinitely obliged to them...."<sup>692</sup> He took this contention further by proposing that since the Jesuits were among the most successful colonizers of the New World, their approach should serve as a model for the administration of other European settlements in the Americas, and more radically, could be profitably employed as among the nations of Christian Europe in determining the treatment of the minorities within their own borders. In this era of Enlightenment, happiness was considered to be the object of government, and that government was good which promoted the greatest happiness for those who lived under its auspices. In this, as in other ways, the Jesuit "reductions" in Paraguay were a signal success for Burke:

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<sup>691</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid*, p. 285.

...can we, by any means, blame a system which produces such salutary effects; and which has found that difficult, but happy way, that grand desideratum in politics, of uniting a perfect subjection to an entire content and satisfaction of the people. Matters, which, it were to be wished, were studied with more attention by us, who content ourselves with railing at the diligence of an adversary, which we should rather praise and imitate; and who, in our affairs, seldom think of using any other instruments than force or money.<sup>693</sup>

### III.

Moving finally to Burke's image of the primitive Amerindian, a critical line from his 1777 letter to William Robertson underscored the principal *difference* between their two accounts: a lack of appreciation for the Native American population on its own terms, not those of Enlightenment Europe. For as Burke related to Robertson, "I only think that in one or two points you have hardly done justice to the savage Character."<sup>694</sup> Burke reinforced this criticism publicly in his anonymous review of the *History of America*: "Dr Robertson has taken no notice of the eloquence or poetry of the Americans, which are among the most distinguished properties of mankind in a state of savage nature."<sup>695</sup> Burke was on solid ground in making his point, for twenty years earlier he had devoted the entire Part II in the first volume of the *Settlements* to just such a consideration of "The Manners of the Americans."<sup>696</sup>

As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, the New World was revealed to Europeans slowly and over more than two centuries. Columbus' image of America as both connected to Europe in a classicized, idealized way through the mists of time and distinct from Europe in being a fabulous and exotic paradise were essentially the interpretive lines set down and imaginatively absorbed by European artists and writers through the later half of the eighteenth century.<sup>697</sup> Some of the poets Burke read most wrote on their image of the natives in the New World. Edmund Spenser described, "paynted plumes in goodly order dight/Like as the sunburnt Indians do array/Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight." John Milton crafted similar lines: "*Columbus* found th' *American* so girt/with feathered Cincture, naked else and wilde/Among the Trees and

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<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>694</sup> *Correspondence*, III, p. 351.

<sup>695</sup> *The Annual Register*, 1777, p. 218.

<sup>696</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 167-202.

<sup>697</sup> Hugh Honour traces the traditions and images related to Europe's internalization and idealization of America throughout his commentary on early modern drawings and paintings of American Indians, flora, fauna, wildlife, landscapes, and artifacts, *The European Vision of America*, see esp. pp. 1-19.

Isles and woodie Shores.”<sup>698</sup> Such images were absorbed naturally, but not uncritically, into Burke’s classically-trained mind. His training and sensitivities helped him to detect positives and negatives, recognize attractiveness and repulsion in the Amerindians character and civilization. But in either case, even though contemporary European prejudices and standards were his criteria for judgment, he generally wrote with a view toward understanding the native populations on their own terms.

In his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, Burke drew a Character sketch of the North American colonists based on six sources: of descent; of form of government; of religion in the Northern provinces; of manners in the Southern; of education; and of the remoteness of situation from the imperial center. Burke concluded that from these sources “a fierce spirit of Liberty” grew strong in Britain’s American colonies.<sup>699</sup> In the pages of the *Settlements*, much as he did with the Peruvians, Burke sketched a similar Character of the Native Americans and its role in fashioning their own fierce commitment to liberty. His organization and emphases in doing so was much the same as it would be in his later *Conciliation* speech, and it resulted in a consideration of the Native Americans that parallels and complements his later outline of the principally British Americans in North America. The Character sketch of the Native Americans compared with the Character sketch of the British Americans will highlight the nature of Burke’s image of both peoples, as well as point to the very practical ways in which Burke would put his earliest study of America to use in drafting his most celebrated speech on America two decades later. In doing so, it would seem most effective to compare directly Burke’s analysis of the Amerindian and British American characters, following precisely his own organization in the *Conciliation* speech and using the six sources mentioned above that Burke believed combined to forge the American character.

## Character

*Native Americans:* “The character of the Indians is striking. They are grave even to sadness in their deportment upon any serious occasion; observant of those in company; respectful to the old; of a temper cool and deliberate.... The people of America are tall, and straight in their limbs beyond the proportion of most nations; their bodies are strong; but of a species of strength rather fitted to endure much hardship, than to continue long at any servile work, by which they

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<sup>698</sup> Spencer, *The Faerie Queene* (1589), Book III, canto xii, stanza 8; Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667), Book IX, lines 1116-1118. Quoted in Honour, p. 4.

<sup>699</sup> *WS*, III, pp. 125, 119.

are quickly consumed; it is the strength of a beast of prey, rather than that of a beast of burden.... Liberty, in its fullest extent, is the darling passion of the Americans. To this they sacrifice every thing. This is what makes a life of uncertainty and want supportable to them; and their education is directed in such a manner as to cherish this disposition to the utmost."<sup>700</sup>

*British Americans*: "In this Character of the Americans, a love of Freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole: and as an ardent is always a jealous affection, your Colonies become suspicious, restive, and untractable, whenever they see the least attempt to wrest from them by force, or shuffle from them by chicane, what they think the only advantage worth living for. This fierce spirit of Liberty is stronger in the English Colonies probably than in any other people of the earth...."<sup>701</sup>

## Descent

*Native Americans*: "The Aborigines of America, throughout the whole extent of the two vast continents which they inhabit...form a very striking picture of the most distant antiquity. Whoever confides in the Americans of this day, not only studies the manners of a remote present nation, but he studies, on some measure, the antiquities of all nations; from which no mean lights may be thrown upon many parts of the ancient authors, both sacred and profane."<sup>702</sup>

*British Americans*: "[T]he people of the Colonies are descendants of Englishmen. England, Sir, is a nation, which still I hope respects, and formerly adored, her freedom. The Colonists emigrated from you when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are therefore not only devoted to Liberty, but to Liberty according to English ideas, and on English principles."<sup>703</sup>

## Form of Government

*Native Americans*: "They are indulged in all manner of liberty; they are never upon any account chastised with blows; they are rarely even chided... On the same principle, they know no punishment but death. They lay no fines, because they have no way of exacting them from free men; and the death, which they sometimes inflict, is rather a consequence of a sort of war declared against a public enemy, than an act of judicial power executed on a citizen or subject. This free disposition is general; and, though some tribes are found in America with a head, whom we call a king, his power is rather persuasive than coercive, and he is revered as a father, more than feared as a monarch. He has no guards, no prisons, no officers of justice. The other forms, which may be

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<sup>700</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 170; 168; 175.

<sup>701</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, pp. 119-120.

<sup>702</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 167. Burke, thus, traced the descent of the Amerindians to a distant antiquity.

<sup>703</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, p. 120. Colonial descent is obviously more recent, traceable to early modern Britain principally.



confided as a sort of aristocracy, have no more power. This latter is the more common in North America....”<sup>704</sup>

*British Americans:* “Their governments are popular in an high degree; some are merely popular; in all, the popular representative is the most weighty; and this share of the people in their ordinary government never fails to inspire them with lofty sentiments, and with a strong aversion from whatever tends to deprive them of their chief importance.”<sup>705</sup>

## Religion

*Native Americans:* “A people who live by hunting, who inhabit mean cottages, and are given to change the place of their habitation, are seldom very religious.... Some appear to have very little idea of God. Others entertain better notions; they hold the existence of the Supreme Being, eternal and incorruptible, who has power over all. Satisfied with owning this, which is traditionally amongst them, they give him no sort of worship. There are indeed nations in America, who seem to pay some religious homage to the sun and moon....”<sup>706</sup>

*British Americans:* “Religion, always a principle of energy, in this new people is no way worn out or impaired; and their mode of professing it is also one main cause of this free spirit. The people are protestants; and of that kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favourable to liberty, but built upon it. I do not think, Sir, that the reason of this averseness in the dissenting churches, from all that looks like absolute government, is so much to be sought in their religious tenets, as in their history.... [T]he dissenting interests have sprung up in direct opposition to all the ordinary powers of the world; and could justify that opposition only on a strong claim to natural liberty. Their very existence depended on the powerful and unremitted assertion of that claim. All protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent. But the religion most prevalent in our Northern Colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, and the protestantism of the protestant religion.”<sup>707</sup>

## Manners

*Native Americans:* “Almost the sole occupation of the American is war, or such an exercise as qualifies him for it. His whole glory consists in this; and no man is at all considered until he has increased the strength of his country with a captive, or adorned his house with a scalp of one of its enemies... Their motives for engaging in a war are rarely those views which excite us to it. They have no other end but the glory of the victory, or the benefit of the slaves which it enables them to add to their nation, or sacrifice to their brutal fury; and it is rare that they take any pains to give their wars even a color of justice.... Their whole

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<sup>704</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 175-176.

<sup>705</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, p. 121.

<sup>706</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 173-174.

<sup>707</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, pp. 121-122.

art of war consists in this: they never fight in the open field, but upon some very extraordinary occasions; not from cowardice, for they are brave; but they despise this method, as unworthy an able warrior, and as an affair in which fortune governs more than prudence.”<sup>708</sup>

*British Americans:* “There is, however, a circumstance attending these Colonies, which, in my opinion, fully counterbalances this difference, and makes the spirit of liberty still more high and haughty than in those to the North-ward. It is, that in Virginia and the Carolinas they have a vast multitude of slaves. Where this is the case in any part of the world, those who are free, are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege. Not seeing there, that freedom, as in countries where it is a common blessing, and as broad and general as the air, may be united with much abject toil, with great misery, with all the exterior of servitude, liberty looks, amongst them, like something that is more noble and liberal.”<sup>709</sup>

## Education

*Native Americans:* “The whole fashion of their lives is of a piece; hardy, poor, and squalid; and their education from their infancy is solely directed to fit their bodies for this mode of life, and to form their minds to inflict and to endure the greatest evils. Their only occupations are hunting and war. Nothing is more edifying than their behavior in their public councils and assemblies.... The younger sort attend for their instruction. Here they learn the history of their nation; here they are inflamed with the songs of those who celebrate the warlike actions of their ancestors; and here they are taught what are the interests of their country, and how to pursue them.... Notwithstanding, this ferocity, no people have their anger, or at least the show of their anger, more under their command. From their infancy they are formed with care to endure scoffs, taunts, blows, and every sort of insult patiently, or at least with a composed countenance. This is one of the principal objects of their education. They esteem nothing so unworthy a man of sense and constancy, as a peevish temper, and a proneness to a sudden and rash anger.”<sup>710</sup>

*British Americans:* “[A]nother circumstance in our Colonies, which contributes no mean part towards the growth and effect of this untractable spirit. I mean their education. In no country perhaps in the world is the law so general a study. The profession itself is numerous and powerful; and in most provinces it takes the lead. The greater number of the Deputies sent to the Congress were Lawyers. But all who read, (and most do read,) endeavour to obtain some smattering in that science. I have been told by an eminent Bookseller, that in no branch of his business, after tracts of popular devotion, were so many books as those on the Law exported to the Plantations. The Colonists have now fallen into the way of printing them for their own use. I hear that they have sold nearly as many of Blackstone's Commentaries in America as in England.... This study renders men

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<sup>708</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 188-192.

<sup>709</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, p. 122.

<sup>710</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 168-169; 170-172.

acute, inquisitive, dexterous, prompt in attack, ready in defence, full of resources. In other countries, the people, more simple, and of a less mercurial cast, judge of an ill principle in government only by an actual grievance; here they anticipate the evil, and judge of the pressure of the grievance by the badness of the principle. They augur misgovernment at a distance; and snuff the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze.”<sup>711</sup>

## Remoteness

*Native Americans:* “The nations of America are at an immense distance from each other, with a vast desert frontier, and hid in the bosom of hideous, and almost boundless forests.... But to the enemies of his country, or those who have privately offended, the American is implacable. He conceals his sentiments, he appears reconciled, until by some treachery or surprise he has an opportunity of executing a horrible revenge. No length of time is sufficient to allay his resentment; no distance of place great enough to protect the object he crosses the steepest mountains, he pierces the most impracticable forests, and traverses the most hideous bogs and deserts for several hundreds of miles, bearing the inclemency of the seasons, the fatigue of the expedition, and the extremes of hunger and thirst, with patience and cheerfulness, in hopes of surprising his enemy.... To such extremes do the Indians push their friendship or their enmity; and such indeed in general is the character of all strong and uncultivated minds.”<sup>712</sup>

*British Americans:* “The last cause of this disobedient spirit in the Colonies is hardly less powerful than the rest, as it is not merely moral, but laid deep in the natural constitution of things. Three thousand miles of ocean lie between you and them. No contrivance can prevent the effect of this distance in weakening government. Seas roll, and months pass, between the order and the execution; and the want of a speedy explanation of a single point is enough to defeat a whole system.”<sup>713</sup>

Burke’s formulation of the “map of mankind” rolled out before contemporary Europeans in its fullness for the first time revealed that he stood with Columbus’ idealization of the Americas as holding out to Europeans a window in their own past “Golden Age.” The symmetry in analysis and similarity in content and interests demonstrated in these two sketches helps to highlight the degree to which he studied and appreciated the Amerindians on their own terms. Burke was interested in mapping these common and unique features of the peoples and cultures on both continents for entertainment and guidance. Burke, as he told William Robertson, had always thought about the advantages of tracing contemporary mores, institutions, manners, and laws back

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<sup>711</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *WS*, III, pp. 123-124.

<sup>712</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 171-172.

<sup>713</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775), *WS*, III, p. 124.

to their sources. Now he had before him a way in which not only to trace immemorial institutions, habits, and customs of Britain back into the mists of its own particular history, but America provided him with a whole other people in an unspoiled, from a European perspective, setting to which to compare what is natural and what is unique about the development of Britain and America. In the *Settlements*, he did so with objectivity and sympathy. In ways impossible for Burke to foresee, his study of the character of the Amerindian served to sharpen and give historical depth to his later understanding of the character of the colonial British Americans.

His work in this regard also provided him with a practical writing opportunity in which to display the usefulness of philosophical consideration of the aesthetics of the sublime to his historical and political thought. Terror had a central place in the Amerindian culture. It was one of the most important means by which they maintained or reinforced the intensity of social affections and communal bonds.

As mentioned above, Burke was particularly horrified in the late 1770s by Britain's use of Native American Indians and "Negroes" in their war against their own British subjects in North America. He relentlessly and passionately attacked the immorality and incompetence, "distress and intimidation"<sup>714</sup> of British tactics leading up to their humiliating defeat at Saratoga, NY (1777). In his *Speech on the Use of Indians* (1778), he reserved particular scorn for General John Burgoyne (1722-1792), who he singled out for blithely resorting to such tactics while professing "restraint" and touting the fact "that care had been taken to prevent mischief" and amounting to the "sublimity of bombast absurdity."<sup>715</sup> The destruction of the Indian and Negro character, the reduction of their humanity, and the debasement of their culture were effects of this policy that troubled Burke as it morally and politically degraded the British "users" as much as it did the used. As he observed, "to employ them was merely to be cruel ourselves in their persons; and to become chargeable with all the odious and impotent barbarities, which they would certainly commit, whenever they were called into action."<sup>716</sup> And, Burke pointed out, they "did in effect, indiscriminately murder men, women, and children, and friend and foes; and that particularly the slaughter fell mostly

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<sup>714</sup> *Speech on the Use of Indians* (1778), *WS*, III, pp. 358-359.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid*, p. 358.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid*, p. 357.

upon those where were best affected to the King's government, and who for that reason had been lately disarmed by the provincials."<sup>717</sup>

Burke wrote in his notes that the native Americans were once a "great" and "we a little people involved and entangled in their affairs by a course of Events [which] reduced [them]—Now only bodies of banditti of the most cruel and atrocious kind."<sup>718</sup> One negative political result for the colonists, he believed, was that the corruption and experience of "wild illiterate savages" would make it difficult to restrain the Indians in victory and heighten the likelihood of a "Negro insurrection," in both cases following from the "rage of new found freedom."<sup>719</sup> Burke mockingly added that such a policy and the justifications of Burgoyne was as "if, at a riot on Tower Hill, the keeper of the wild beasts had turned them loose, but adding, 'my gentle lions, my sentimental wolves, my tender-hearted hyenas, go forth, but take care not to hurt men, women, or children.'"<sup>720</sup> In some suggestive ways for Burke, before there was a Hastings, there was a Burgoyne.

Various commentators have taken this reservedly anti-colonial position of Burke's to argue that Burke believed the native Americans were "subtilized into savages,"<sup>721</sup> that their ruthless and savage conduct was the result of the degradation, the dehumanization, they suffered once European colonialists intruded into their hitherto shrouded existence. As Luke Gibbons notes, to take one such example, "The implication here is that barbarism for Burke is not so much an inherent characteristic of Indian life as a state into which they have fallen due to historical circumstances, which in this case meant the corrosive influence of colonization."<sup>722</sup> Gibbons is inclined to believe that Burke viewed the Indian character as more or less unstained by shocking acts of violence unless reduced to such levels by colonization from outsiders. A close reading of Burke's treatment of the Native American character as it unfolds in the *Settlements*—a text Gibbons himself used and praised in his study—presents a more complicated picture of Burke's view of the relation of savagery to the Indian character.

It is true that Burke believed such tendencies were aggravated in Indians due to the historical circumstance of the European discovery of their world. Still, Burke also

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<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 362; 361 (quoted in Walpole's *Last Journals*).

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 361 (quoted in Walpole's *Last Journals*).

<sup>721</sup> Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 183ff.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.



concluded that terror and violence were deeply ingrained, and not entirely negative if judged by their own needs and aims in perpetrating it, into the character and culture of the Amerindians. The following excerpt of the manner in which the Indians dealt with prisoners or traitors demonstrates this point with a vivid style Burke would also use in his later speeches on the use of Indians in the Revolutionary war and the treatment of the natives in India by the East India Company:

[T]he conquerors satiate their savage fury with the most shocking insults and barbarities to the dead, biting their flesh, tearing the scalp from their heads, and wallowing in their blood like wild beasts. The fate of their prisoners is the most severe of all.... A scaffold is raised, and the prisoner tied to the stake. Instantly he opens his death song, and prepares for the ensuing scene of cruelty with the most undaunted courage. On the other side, they prepare to put it to the utmost proof, with every torment, which the mind of man ingenious in mischief can invent. They begin at the extremities of his body, and gradually approach the trunk. One plucks out his nails by the roots, one by one; another takes a finger onto his mouth, and tears off the flesh with his teeth; a third thrusts the finger, mangled as it is, into the bole of a pipe made red hot, which he smokes like tobacco. Then they pound his toes and fingers to pieces between two stones; they cut circles about his joints, and gashes in the fleshy parts of his limbs, which they sear immediately with red-hot irons, cutting and tearing alternately; they pull off this flesh thus mangled and roasted, bit by bit, devouring it with greediness, and smearing their faces with the blood, in an enthusiasm of horror and fury. When they have thus torn off the flesh, they twist the bare nerves and tendons about an iron, tearing and snapping them; whilst others are employed in pulling and extending the limbs themselves, in every way that can increase the torment. This continues often five or six hours together. Then they frequently unbind him, to give a breathing to their fury, to think what new torments they shall inflict, and to refresh the strength of the sufferer, who, wearied out with such a variety of unheard-of torments, often falls immediately into so profound a sleep, that they are obliged to apply the fire to awaken him, and renew his sufferings.<sup>723</sup>

Burke included several pages of such gruesome accounts in the *Settlements* and in doing so certainly played in part to the entertainment such accounts would provide for a reading public possessed of prejudices that such descriptions of Amerindian behavior would confirm. But more interesting in terms of Burke's own thought, it also highlights his appreciation for the manners or customs of cultural "others" as they related to the universal need of man to politically organize and create institutions, mores, conventions, traditions, and the like for the overarching objective of fashioning an ordered community

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<sup>723</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 196-197.

or polity. Burke demonstrated admiration for all parties involved in what on the surface appeared to be a senseless and bloodthirsty act of primitives.

Of overarching significance, though, for the purposes of this thesis, is the way in which passages such as this already demonstrate how Burke could intellectually operate on many levels, and then take a theoretical insight and turn it to practical political use. In this case, he tapped into the latent fears of his readers that the barbarism they see might also be a projection of the barbarism that lie within themselves. As Hugh Honour contends, Indian exoticism and violence were “pleasurable” because it deviated from European norms.<sup>724</sup> Burke would appreciate the effects such terror had on titillating the passions so long as the “danger” was remote. Thus, in such passages Burke was able to give an objective account of the Amerindians on their own terms, confirm a prejudice of his readers, and, finally, make use of both to argue for the critical importance for Europeans of their own traditions of law, religion, and commerce.

Burke was not subtle to this end. He drew the conclusion he wanted his reader to arrive at once the emotional reaction to such passages had passed:

I do not dwell upon these circumstances of cruelty, which so degrade human nature, out of choice; but, as all who mention the customs of this people have inflicted upon their behavior in this respect very particularly, and as it seems necessary to give a true idea of their character. I did not choose to omit it. *It serves to show too, in the strongest light, to what an inconceivable degree of barbarity the passions of men let loose will carry them.* It will point out to us the advantages of a religion that teaches a compassion to our enemies, which is neither known nor practiced in other religions; and *it will make us more sensible, than some appear to be, of the value of commerce, the art of civilized life, and the lights of literature;* which, if they have abated the force of some of the natural virtues by the luxury which attends them, have taken out likewise the sting of our natural vices, and softened the ferocity of the human race without enervating their courage.<sup>725</sup>

After providing for his reader the moral to be derived from his accounts, Burke also took the opportunity to moderate the effect of his narrative in confirming contemporary European prejudices regarding the savage character of the Indian by positing in an objective and reasonable style that, “on the other hand, the constancy of the sufferers in this terrible scene *shows the wonderful power of an early institution*, and a ferocious thirst of glory, which makes men imitate and exceed what philosophy, or even

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<sup>724</sup> Honour, *The European Vision of America*, p. 8.

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

religion can effect.”<sup>726</sup> The multiple uses Burke put his study of the Amerindian character and manners was evident again in 1778 when he invoked the story of the horrid murder and scalping of Jane McCrea (1754-1777), who ironically was engaged at the time to one of Burgoyne’s soldiers, at the hands of the Indians the General had employed as mercenaries in his force: as Burke would write in condemning Burgoyne, “Those who have ordered have done it.”<sup>727</sup> For Burke as it was for American patriots, it was an occasion to re-enforce sentiments against the prevailing British policy in British America.<sup>728</sup>

It is quite possible, then, to imagine that one of the reasons Burke might not want to publicly associate himself with the *Settlements* was that the sympathies toward Amerindians, Spanish and French Catholics, and various English religious and political minorities in North America evident in its pages would likely be used by his many critics in their ongoing character assassinations of Burke and as a weapon to further discredit his (and his party’s) American policies. In any case, Burke’s understanding of the relative superiority of European culture to the civilizations of the various Amerindians was less chauvinistic than was many of his contemporaries. Burke was generally more nuanced. His analysis suggested that the degree to which civility and barbarism were found together in the same people was greater and less objective than one might imagine (excepting in the realm of material progress).

As Burke’s theory of history evolved in the *Settlements*, one aspect of it here is salient: the only thing to expect of history is the unexpected. A related fact of which Burke did not lose sight in either his early or his later writings is that from the baser parts of our human nature arise the incentives for colonization: avarice, power, and rebellion against established authorities. The irony, however, was that these vices must be so “presented” as to accentuate the virtue of the enterprise and “something of the vastness in the view....” In this respect, Burke was a fellow traveler of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. Conceding the important place of incentive and self-interest in the advance of mankind, Burke contended that the “majority of mankind” do not have “dispositions”

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<sup>726</sup> *Ibid*, emphasis added.

<sup>727</sup> Burke’s account of this event was included in his *Speech on the Use of Indians* (1778) and the historical article in the *Annual Register* for 1777, the account of which precisely corresponds with the contents of his speech. See *Speech on the Use of Indians*, pp. 358ff, and *The Annual Register for 1777*, p. 156.

<sup>728</sup> Luke Gibbons makes this point and includes a lengthy discussion of the McCrea murder and the political uses of it during the Revolutionary War in his *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, pp. 185-207.

suitable to enlightened conquest, and do not “reason well enough to see” the benefits of disinterested colonial settlement. That being the case, principled and far-sighted leadership became all the more important for Burke. Such persons were the “strong beams and joists” of the colonial foundation.<sup>729</sup> It was essential that those chosen to undertake or lead colonial efforts be persons of “comprehensive views,” capable of reconciling whatever private interests they might have to a larger and disinterested pursuit of the good of the commonweal.

Indeed, so much of the reward of his early study of America would come in the ways it reappeared in his writings on the American colonies, Ireland, and India. In particular, Burke’s narrative account of the culture and conquest of India, his passionate concern about British abuses in another part of the empire, and with his compassion for its native inhabitants, reads much like the narrative accounts European encounters with and settlement among the American Indians—the name of the natives itself giving both ironic and substantive reasons for such uses. His richly complex sketches in the 1780s of figures and cases such as Chait Singh, the begams of Oudh, the Nawab of the Carnatic, Almas Ali Kahn, Maharaja Nandakumar, and the overall character and case of Warren Hastings, offer examples of how Burke would put his American interests to use in the years after Britain lost its North American colonies—though for all their merit they were less cool and more personally heated, emotional, and exaggerated than his American writings.<sup>730</sup> Of note in this regard is that his “kinsman” William Burke, who spent the better part of two decades in India as an imperial administrator, played the key role of amanuensis much as he had done earlier in the 1750s and 1760s.<sup>731</sup>

And similarly, throughout his writings on the American crisis the payoff for his early historical labors came in one sense from the great oratorical benefit he realized in the many Character sketches he employed in his debates. For example, his long Character of Charles Townshend (1725-1767), abbreviated here:

I speak of Charles Townshend... whom I cannot even now remember without some degree of sensibility. In truth, Sir, he was the delight and ornament of this house, and the charm of every private society which he honoured with his presence. Perhaps there never arose in this country, nor in any country, a man of

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<sup>729</sup> See *Settlements*, II, p. 267.

<sup>730</sup> Two volumes, V and VI, in the current Oxford *Writings and Speeches* are devoted to the reports and speeches on India and the impeachment of Warren Hastings through 1788. One more is scheduled for publication in the near future.

<sup>731</sup> See P.J. Marshall’s editor’s introduction to Edmund’s *Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts*, *WS*, V, p. 478.

a more pointed and finished wit; and (where his passions were not concerned) of a more refined, exquisite, and penetrating a judgment. If he had not so great a stock, as some have had who flourished formerly, of knowledge long treasured up, he knew better by far, than any man I was ever acquainted with, how to bring together within a short time, all that was necessary to establish, to illustrate, and to decorate, that side of the question he supported. He stated his matter skillfully and powerfully. He particularly excelled in a most luminous explanation, and display of his subject. His style of argument was neither trite and vulgar, nor subtle and abstruse. He hit the house just between wind and water.—And not being troubled with too anxious a zeal for any matter in question, he was never more tedious, or more earnest, than the pre-conceived opinions, and present temper of his hearers required; to whom he was always in perfect unison. He conformed exactly to the temper of the house; and he seemed to guide, because he was always sure to follow it....”<sup>732</sup>

An important aspect of Burke’s Christian Enlightenment then becomes evident in his account of the European conquests in and administration of Mexico, Peru, Ireland, British North America, and, later, India. While the secular spirit of Enlightenment sought to produce objective, scientifically verifiable studies, those assumptions did not completely work for Burke. He did not believe there was a “science of society.” He only held to a partial stadial theory of historical development or progress. He did not share the view that history was moving ever more linearly from ages of darkness to light. He did, of course, accept that there were “stages” indicative of mankind’s development through time. And he was eager to explore the ways in which the new eighteenth-century movement of political economy affected such advances. But for him even these phases were somewhat changeable or adjustable both within and between periods. In this his historical craft was perhaps more flexible than even Robertson’s. He recognized continuity in human nature and held an orthodox Christian view of the implications in history of the doctrine of free will.

It was through the study and writing of American history, however, that Burke conveyed his growing appreciation for the nature of what was unique in his own age. It was a judgment made not by theoretical abstraction but through studying the concrete circumstances of history and the resulting trends and/or actions of notable persons operating within its providential parameters. He was interested in understanding

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<sup>732</sup> *Speech on American Taxation*, *WS*, II, pp. 454-455. See also similar sketches of Lord Chatham (*WS*, II, *Speech on American Taxation*, pp. add cite.), George Grenville (*WS*, II, *Speech on American Taxation*, pp. 431-432), Lord North (“Letter to a Noble Lord” p. 182. *Works*, vol. V), and Sir Robert Walpole (“Letters on a Regicide Peace,” *WS*, V, pp. 288-290).



particular individuals and individual events only to the degree it helped in fashioning or more precisely recognizing established patterns. Burke saw comparative continuities, but with a difference. His “characters,” such as Columbus, Cortés, Pizarro, Penn, and Baltimore, each had an individual purpose and their actions or choices led to different kinds of ends. They were helpful in reinforcing or criticizing the present. They were not useful in establishing patterns of uniformity. Quite the reverse, they reveal, for Burke, great variety. History developed out of many sources and multiple factors for Burke. There may be continuities or connections, but they can’t be put into categories as if there were a fixed pattern of human society.

For Burke, as put forward in this chapter, the universal comes to reality in the concrete, the particular, but is not defined by that particular reality. His magnanimity extended across national cultures and time. He did not indulge, for instance, the popularity of the Spanish black legend, unlike Voltaire, and so did not write to condemn the Spaniards so much as learn from their leading explorers and praise them as warranted, always with a view of what can be usefully learned from or added to our experience. It was Burke’s hope that such labors would contribute to the reformation of manners and taste, and the formation in all of greater prudence. Burke believed that the historical experience gained by the study of the New World accrued to the benefit of those in the Old World. Sufficient and critical knowledge of key historic individuals, trends, and movements was the best way to nourish continually the tree of ordered liberty. For as he came to appreciate, since the “effect of liberty to individuals is, that they may do what they please: we ought to see what it will please them to do before we risque congratulations....”<sup>733</sup> Burke’s historical studies were meant to enlighten his readers by improving moral judgment, by making prudence attractive, and by imparting what he called in another context “a wisdom greater than their own.”<sup>734</sup>

Burke’s statement to William Robertson in 1777 about what he had “always thought” regarding America was precisely this long and complicated history of Europe’s relation to the New World. Burke saw both the many wonderful lessons that could be learned by study of the European settlements in the Americas, but he was always aware of the complicated human and institutional challenges that faced the Europeans.

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<sup>733</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, p. 59.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Civilization as Burke and his contemporaries knew and appreciated was not portable; it was the product of a slow, uneven, and difficult process of experiment and modification. While there were very few developed institutional forces in the Americas outside Mexico and Peru, there was much to learn for the attentive student of human nature and historical development. However, there were also the danger that in such conditions peoples' weaker, "savage" nature would re-emerge or more extreme, zealous partisans of religious-political sects would take hold and develop parts of the New World in an unnatural, less than fully human direction: often resulting in violence, bigotry, intolerance, and an extreme emphasis on the merits of natural liberty. Voltaire, to name one contemporary of Burke, was attracted to this non-institutional aspect of America, as he wrote in *Candide*: "Ah! It would have been better to remain in the paradise of Eldorado than come back to this accursed Europe."<sup>735</sup>

Burke never saw the value of America in that idealized light. He held a comparative and connective vision of America and Europe. To Burke, as Europe was America, America was, and would continue to become, Europe. There was nowhere to run from our common human nature and historical experience. In *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), he would demonstrate his keen awareness of how passions can forge fetters. Laws, manners, and mores, along with the institutions created to formalize and mediate them into the life of a culture, were checks on disordered or misdirected social passions.<sup>736</sup> The sources of those checks—those habits, customs, or manners—can be detected in Burke's early study of America as it related to the connection between religious principles and government: which is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>735</sup> *Candide and Other Stories*, chapter 24, p. 66.

<sup>736</sup> "Men are qualified for civil liberty, in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. . . . Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters." *A Letter from Mr. Burke to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), in *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Daniel Ritchie (Indianapolis, IN, 1992), p. 91

## 6.

### **Burke's Empire of Toleration: Religious Liberty, Slavery, and the Manners of the Americans**

At the outset of his select edition of Burke's writings, the nineteenth-century editor and Burke scholar, Edward John Payne (1844-1904), noted that Burke's "best efforts...are outside the policy of his party. Whiggism had small sympathy with religious freedom for Ireland, with humane and rational government in India, with the abolition of Slavery, or with the denunciation of its own caricature in the first French Republic. We must therefore regard Burke in a light different from that of party statesmanship."<sup>737</sup> This view of Burke as a figure motivated by ideas as opposed to being motivated opportunistically according to the shifting demands of party politics is an important one to emphasize. Burke was committed to notions of toleration and, by extension, "trusteeship" in an imperial context, long before he might have considered it expedient. Indeed, one can question whether Burke's later championing of toleration within the empire of British governance was ever expedient in this way. The salient concern in this chapter, however, is the deeper source of his thinking on matters such as religious liberty and slavery, which would be of such political import later in his career and demand from him clear thinking and principle.

In 1779, Burke wrote to James Boswell after an Edinburgh mob had ransacked the chapel of the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Lowland District of Scotland, George Hay (1729-1811), that as "the Romans in our day are not so dangerous" as the ancient Britons, he could not "conceive that Bishop Hay is so dreadful a person as Julius Agricola." In that context Burke offered Boswell the following pointed thoughts:

As to the Riot which has been <Performed>, and the rebellion which threatened, they have at least the advantage of diversifying the Scene of our modern contentions. A religious war was not exactly the thing I expected in my time.... You certainly have the right to a rebellion in your town...But without presuming to arraign any ones fancy, I confess, that the American rebellion is more to my Taste than that which you are cooking in the North. I think it <behoves> as well

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<sup>737</sup> E. J. Payne, *Select Works*, I, p. 5.

to resist an act of Taxation as an act of Toleration; and it would hurt me rather more to have the Excise in my own house, than the Mass in my Neighbors.<sup>738</sup>

Burke's shock that mob violence motivated by religious intolerance was occurring in the very seat of the Enlightenment in Britain, home to "the most learned professors and most eminent Writers," is evidence of the degree to which he believed he was part of an "enlightened" time in which such intense levels of mob violence and intolerance were on the decline and not the rise. And so he wondered in his letter how it was that because political solutions to the oppression of Catholics in Scotland were being discussed in Parliament the Scottish mob found it right "to burn mens houses and to despoil them of their Goods, because somebody is supposed to intend them an Act of Kindness...."<sup>739</sup>

Furthermore, the connection he made in this letter between taxation and toleration suggest the degree to which he believed both were matters of fundamental policy concern for the governance of the Empire. As he believed the American rebellion was rooted in fiscal and administrative injustices<sup>740</sup> it was a less intractable problem for the Empire than were revolts grounded in the even more stubborn prejudices of religious or ideological intolerance. His conclusions to this end as they related to his study of America are important in two ways: first, it is in the pages of the *Settlements* that Burke would begin to apply this component of his later political thought to an analysis of historical events and persons; and, second, it raises the question dealt with near the end of this thesis regarding how it was that Burke, who spent so much time studying radical religious enthusiasm in colonial British America did not detect the dangerous direction some of those same elements took in the context of the American Revolutionary period. Had he recognized it, he might not have become a "friend" to the colonial cause to the degree he was—or was perceived to be by the colonists in North America.

Indeed, Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) captured the American view of Burke during this period when she wrote that he was a great champion "for the establishment of

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<sup>738</sup> Burke to James Boswell, 1 March 1779, *Correspondence*, IV, pp. 45-46. The editor of Burke's correspondence notes that Burke met Hay one year earlier in London. Hay was a leading opponent of the Scottish penal laws.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>740</sup> "The Colonies draw from you, as with their life-blood, these ideas and principles. Their love of liberty, as with you, fixed and attached on this specific point of taxing. Liberty might be safe, or might be endangered, in twenty other particulars, without their being much pleased or alarmed. Here they felt its pulse; and as they found that beat, they thought themselves sick or sound." Burke in *Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775), *WS*, III, pp. 120-121.

freedom in all countries....”<sup>741</sup> Such a Revolutionary American view of Burke as a champion for the “establishment of freedom” was rooted in Burke’s own advocacy for a proper understanding of the “constitution of freedom.”<sup>742</sup> That constitution was balanced in part by his dual advocacy of and appreciation for religious toleration and religious establishment. Burke’s commitment to the importance of the Christian religion to Western society has been discussed. He could speak on the one hand of the relationship “in a Christian commonwealth” when “the Church and the State are one and the same thing, being different integral parts of the same whole”; while on the other hand write that, “I should think myself, irrational and inconsistent (to say no worse) if I refused to apply my Ideas of Civil to religious Liberty.”<sup>743</sup>

## I.

Burke’s belief in the overriding importance of toleration was a dominant theme in his early American writings, and, as mentioned, it continued to be a consistent belief throughout his life. Establishment was a more relative issue for Burke. As he put it succinctly, “a great deal depends on the state in which you find men.” In his view it was “not morally true that we are bound to establish in every country that form of religion which in our minds is most agreeable to truth, and conduces most to the eternal happiness of mankind. In the same manner, it is not true that we are, against the conviction of our own judgment, to establish a system of opinions and practices directly contrary to those ends.... No conscientious man would willingly establish what he knew to be false and mischievous in religion.... No wise man...would...pay no regard to the established opinions and prejudices of mankind, or refuse to them the means of securing a religious instruction suitable to those prejudices.”<sup>744</sup>

He believed along with many others of his age that Christianity was both true and useful. It was true, and believers deserved protection to worship as they choose. It was useful, and thus the state must positively protect it through law, and where culturally accepted, establishment. It should also be protected negatively by curtailing those sects or

<sup>741</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, edited by Lester H. Cohn (2 Volumes, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988), Volume II, pp. 519-520.

<sup>742</sup> Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* (1780), *WS*, III, p. 659.

<sup>743</sup> Burke, *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians* (1792), *Works*, VII, p. 43; and Burke to John Erskine, 12 June 1779, *Correspondence*, IV, p. 84.

<sup>744</sup> *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians* (1792), *Works*, VII, pp. 42-43.



practices that aimed to undermine the political regime and fundamentally attack the habits, customs, and prejudices of a nation. If dissenters or others announce their intention to undermine the church, then, Burke thought it was reasonable for a state to consider putting laws in place to deny them the political mechanism to achieve such an aim: the “question” being “whether you should keep them within the bounds of toleration, or subject yourself to their persecution.”<sup>745</sup> And so while his analysis of the situation in the 1790s may have, in retrospect, inclined him to verbal excess and exaggeration of the threats posed by such dissenters, he never proposed new punitive measures against them. He only argued against lifting current legal impediments to their achieving power given the climate of the time and their expressed intentions. Presumably, if and when the heat of the revolutionary-era subsided, Burke would have relaxed even this tough view as, in general, he put a higher premium on toleration than on establishment as a moral and political good.

This perspective had a directly political application as Burke’s view of empire would come to require that the metropolitan center be tolerant of the differences and demands of its colonies. This was at the core of what he meant in his insistence that the North American colonies, and later colonial policy in India, must always be characterized by “prudent and wise management.” This prudential wisdom included respect for cultural and religious differences. In this political sense, the Declaratory Act of 1766 was a plea for imperial toleration. As such Burke’s view of religious toleration and church establishment was crucial to his understanding of the nature of good government. It revealed the tensions in Burke’s thought and the ways in which he sought to reconcile the universal and particular. In the 1790s, he would view atheistic and dissenting movements as a revolutionary danger to the integrity of English society and so advance political measures against them and strongly argue in favor of the church establishment in England. However, this stance should be viewed as a move required by circumstance: the need to protect the constitution and with it inherited customs.

More exceptional for his age, Burke would argue at the very time he was writing his *Speech on Conciliation with America* (1775) that religious toleration should be granted beyond the Christian denominational lines: “I would give a full civil protection, in which I include an immunity, from all disturbance of their public religious worship,

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<sup>745</sup> *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians* (1792), p. 48.

and a power of teaching in schools, as well as Temples, to Jews, Mahometans, and even Pagans.”<sup>746</sup> He would acknowledge that this broad a view of toleration would bring him political grief, as he wrote, “If on Account of such Sentiments, people call me a Roman Catholick, it will give me not the smallest degree of disturbance. They do me too much honour, who aggregate me as a member to any one of those respectable Societies which compose the body of Christianity. Wherever they choose to place me, I am sure to be found in extraordinarily good Company. I do not aspire to the Glory of being a distinguished Zealot for any National Church, until I can be much more certain than I am, that I can do it honour by my doctrine or my Life, or serve it in some more reputable and effectual manner than by a passionate proceeding against those who are of another description.”<sup>747</sup> His advocacy of church establishments as such, while it would become more important in the context of threats (real or perceived) to its very existence in the 1790s, was not as central an element of his overall political thought as was toleration.

As can be detected from the preceding citations, Burke’s commitment to religious toleration largely followed from his own theological Latitudinarianism. However, there were other sources at work as well. For one, his personal experience of oppression along religious lines in Ireland was an obvious spring. In general, though, as Martin Fitzpatrick has argued, students of the idea of toleration “soon discover that many of [these ideas] were of ancient origin.” For example, the idea that conscience should be allowed to operate free from official state interference was a theme throughout early Christianity. These Patristic views found new vigor and application in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the rise of the confessional state. Fitzpatrick also points to a tradition this thesis has argued as being central to the fashioning of Burke’s ideas, Renaissance Humanism, as being instrumental in advancing an “irenical” alternative to “the fierce conflict brought about by the Reformation.” The skeptical strain within the Humanist tradition also contributed to the movement toward toleration as it doubted that there could be one rational explanation for the fullness and mystery of the Christian creed. The

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<sup>746</sup> Burke to William Burgh, 9 February 1775, *Correspondence*, III, p. 110. Four years later he would write to Dr. John Erskine that he would extend such protection even to adherents of natural or rational forms of religion, 12 June 1779, *Correspondence*, IV, p. 85: “I think so of the whole of all the considerable parts of those who profess our common Hope; having at the same time, that degree of respect for all other religions, even for those who have nothing better than mere human Reason, or the unregulated instincts of human Nature, for their basis, that I could not prevail on myself to bestow on the Synagogue, the Mosque or the Pagoda, the language which your pulpits lavish upon a great part of the Christian world.”

<sup>747</sup> Letter to Dr. John Erskine, 12 June 1779, *Correspondence*, IV, p. 85

reduction of Christianity to its “essentials” thus was advanced as were new approaches to the study of natural law which might provide a better theoretical basis for a moral order based on consent. Two other “tolerationist” positions were what Fitzpatrick calls the republican and *politique* traditions: “the former stressed the value of religion to civil society as a communal bond and moral cement” while the latter faced the reality of “irreducible divisions [and] accepted that compromises had to be made with religious minorities which could not be forcibly converted....”<sup>748</sup> And, of course, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and John Locke (1632-1704) were proponents of “rival” concepts of toleration; the former of unlimited toleration for religious belief, the latter of toleration for a range of belief within the larger Christian tradition.<sup>749</sup> Burke drew on many of the thinkers associated with these movements, such as the Church Fathers, John Locke, natural law thinkers such as Richard Hooker (1554-1600) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Renaissance Humanists, skeptics such as Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), and a host of thinkers associated with the Atlantic republican tradition of political thought<sup>750</sup>—all of whom found representation in Burke’s library.

The notion of toleration in Burke’s “map of mankind” was particularly evident in his study of the British settlements in North America. He read and admired Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* (1721), which amounted in part to an early attempt to study religion and religious belief through an anthropological or comparative lens.<sup>751</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, this method was central to the writing of the *Settlements* and to Burke’s examination of the place of religion throughout the Americas from the time of its European discovery to his own. With the exception of some parts of New England and the southern colonies, Burke generally viewed colonial British America as being an innovative place for experiments in religious liberty. Historians of our time have taken much the same view. James E. Bradley, for example, recently observed that, “The first extended public debate over toleration in Europe occurred amid the upheavals of the English civil wars. At about the same time, the most innovative experiments in religious

<sup>748</sup> Martin Fitzpatrick, “Toleration and the Enlightenment Movement,” in Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, eds., *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 26-29.

<sup>749</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, “Spinoza, Locke, and the Enlightenment Battle for Toleration,” in Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, eds., *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, p. 102.

<sup>750</sup> For an examination of Burke’s views on Church and State as compared with the American founders see Michael W. McConnell, “Establishment and Toleration in Edmund Burke’s ‘Constitution of Freedom,’” *The Supreme Court Review*, volume 1995, 1995, pp. 363-462.

<sup>751</sup> Burke imitated the Oriental style that Montesquieu displayed in the *Lettres Persanes*, see Burke to Shackleton, 1 November 1744, *Correspondence*, I, pp. 34-35.

liberty were attempted in the New World.”<sup>752</sup> He pointed out that such experiments in colonial North America were “practical” if “halting” attempts to provide New World models of religious freedom. And while Lord Baltimore in Maryland and Roger Williams in Rhode Island achieved tolerable success, the settlements in Congregational Massachusetts and in Anglican Virginia were developed on the older European patterns of “confessional regimes” with a corresponding intolerance of dissent.<sup>753</sup> As will be demonstrated below, Burke’s analysis of the North American colonies was conducted along the same lines.

From his early years in Ireland observing first-hand the consequences of iron-fisted suppression of religious freedom to his first historical work more than a decade later, Burke was consistently interested in the key role toleration plays in prudent and just governance. The addition in the *Settlements* of a category he called “an union of affections,” which should be especially preserved in the event “an union of sentiments” is ruptured, can be accounted for by Burke’s philosophical interest in the aesthetics of the sublime in the intervening years.

[T]he diversity of people, religions, nations, and languages here, is prodigious, and the harmony in which they live together no less edifying. For though every man, who wishes well to religion, is sorry to see the diversity which prevails, and would by all humane and honest methods endeavour to prevent it; yet, when once the evil has happened, when there is no longer *an union of sentiments*, it is glorious to preserve at least *an union of affections*; it is a beautiful prospect, to see men take and give an equal liberty; to see them live, if not as belonging to the same church, yet to the same Christian religion; and if not to the same religion, yet to the same great fraternity of mankind.<sup>754</sup>

As discussed in chapter three, the problem of sustaining the social affections, cultivating a people’s affections toward their constitutions and customs, was an element of Burke’s philosophical interest in the nature of the sublime and beautiful. He knew it was a tendency of a people not to worry about social institutions until they were threatened. As he put it in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, “we become less sensible to a long-possessed benefit from the very circumstance that it is become habitual,” and, thus, the attraction of novel and adventurous schemes put forward by “active and zealous

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<sup>752</sup> James E. Bradley, “Toleration and Movements of Christian Reunion, 1660-1789,” in Brown & Tackett, eds., *Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution*, p. 353.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 353-354.

<sup>754</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 199-200. Emphasis added.

factions” appeal to a certain temper from which “men and factions, and nations too, have sacrificed the good of which they had been in assured possession, in favor of wild and irrational expectations.”<sup>755</sup> Burke’s desire to examine the nature of social bonds and affections found an important early expression with regards to the role religious toleration played in the history of the European settlement of the North American colonies.

In the *Settlements*, Burke organized his overall analysis of North American settlement by colonial region, north to south: New England, the Middle States, and the South. In his famous *Speech on Conciliation* nearly twenty years later, he followed much the same pattern. In both cases the role of religion was a central focus. Thus, in considering Burke’s earliest thoughts on questions of religious freedom and toleration, it is easiest to follow Burke’s own markings, from the Puritan North to the dissenting (and in one case Catholic) Middle States to the “establishment” church and slaveholding South.

Burke’s aversion to religious intolerance, which on a personal level stemmed from the circumstances of his birth, education, and the conditions of Ireland under the Penal Laws, found an outlet in the *Settlements* in his historical chronicle of “the first attempts to settle North America,” and in particular, to “the rise and progress of the Puritans” in England, their persecution by Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645), and their flight to New England.<sup>756</sup> It was the unintended consequences of such intolerance and persecution that interested Burke initially.<sup>757</sup> He began his historical observations in this area with an empathetic account of the plight of the dissenting party of Puritans, which he nevertheless characterized as having “more zeal and less policy.” He noted that many fled England under Mary only to return during Elizabeth’s reign “with minds sufficiently heated by resentment of their sufferings....”<sup>758</sup> Throughout he was critical of the successive reigns of Elizabeth and the Stuarts for failing to find a prudential way in

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<sup>755</sup> *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *Works*, IV, p. 76.

<sup>756</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 138ff.

<sup>757</sup> One interesting aside illustrates Burke’s sensitivity to historical irony and reinforces his view of the importance of “accident” in history: “It was said that sir Matthew Boynton, sir William Constable, sir Arthur Haslerig, and Oliver Cromwell, were actually upon the point of embarking for New England; when arch-bishop Laud, unwilling that so many objects of his hatred should be removed out of the reach of his power, applied for, and obtained, an order from the court to put a stop to these transportations; and thus he kept forcibly from venting itself, that virulent humour which he lived to see the destruction of himself, his order, his religion, his master, and the constitution of his country.” *Settlements*, II, VII, pp. 145-146.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.



which to accommodate religious diversity in the realm and for their policy of persecuting non-conformists.

Importantly, because this would inform Burke's understanding of the American character for the rest of his life, he argued that these first Americans "were impregnated with an *high spirit of liberty*, and had a *strong tendency to the republican form of government*," having "learned an aversion to the episcopal order, and to religious ceremonies of every sort...."<sup>759</sup> One finds a remarkable parallel in Burke's *Speech on Conciliation*, penned nearly twenty years later: "In this Character of the Americans, a love of Freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole.... This *fierce spirit of Liberty* is stronger in the English Colonies probably than in any other people of the earth...."<sup>760</sup> He based this assertion principally on the English roots of the colonists, especially their religious traditions, which were a "main cause of this free spirit": "The temper and character which prevail in our colonies, are, I am afraid, unalterable by any human art...we cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people.... I think it is nearly as little in our power to change their *republican Religion*, as their free descent...."<sup>761</sup> It is instructive that the source of his analysis in the *Account of the European Settlements in America* can be found in the chapters considering the founding of Britain's American settlements from the perspective of the history and sociology of religion in that kingdom. Again, considering Burke's sensitivity to matters of religious sociology in relation to the Ireland of his youth it is not surprising that he establishes his analysis on this foundation. What is unexpected is the degree and depth to which this view was fixed at such an early point in Burke's career, and in both cases put forward in the context of personal admiration, if not unqualified sympathy.

Burke's analysis of religion in the New England colonies naturally centered on the establishment made there in 1621 by "a colony of puritans." It was, he observed, "in the year 1629 that the colony began to flourish.... That enthusiasm which was reversing every thing at home, and which is so dangerous in every settled community, proved of admirable service here. It became a principle of life and vigour, that enabled them to conquer all the difficulties of a savage country...."<sup>762</sup> Interestingly, by 1757 Burke

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<sup>759</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>760</sup> Burke, *Speech on Conciliation*, WS, III, pp. 119-120. Emphasis added.

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 130. Emphasis added.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

expressly saw a map unfolding in New England upon a territorial *tabula rasa*, where the very forces that he believed could serve to unsettle established communities and churches were in this unsettled place called New England, and by some admirable historical twist, the very force and principle of order and establishment. It was a fact that Burke evidently marveled at and it may well have been a key source of attraction to him as he contemplated the prospect of participating in a colonizing project of this kind.

And, too, that vigor which Burke found in the New World Puritan establishment was in part accounted for by the fact that it was not merely peopled by ordinary subjects, but by “several great men” who left for America after failing to secure religious liberty in England. Great names in early American history were among that group, and Burke presents his audience with the long-term cost of religious intolerance—the drain of men of ability and wealth:

And now, not only they who found themselves uneasy at home upon a religious account, but several by reason of the then profitable trade of furs and skins, and for the sake of the fishery, were invited to settle in New England. But this colony received its principal assistance from the discontent of several great men of the puritan party, who were its protectors, and who entertained a design to settling amongst them in New England, if they should fail in the measures they were pursuing for establishing the liberty, and reforming the religion of their mother country. They solicited grants in New England, and were at a great expence in settling them. Amongst these patentees, we see the lords Brook, Say and Seal, the Pelhams, the Hampdens, and the Pyms; the names which afterwards appeared with so much eclat upon a greater stage.<sup>763</sup>

After sympathetically portraying the Puritan party as victims of religious intolerance, Burke viewed this history from a different angle when sketching the history of Puritanism in New England. In particular, he focused on the historical irony of a particular party of Protestants having to flee the Old World because of religious bigotry only to settle a new one with the kind of narrow fervor for freedom of worship that lent itself to its own form of religious intolerance. And so while the prism of religious intolerance remained, the focus shifted to its negative impact in the New World. His first New England historical sketch focused on the “spirit of persecution” perpetrated by “the most violent

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<sup>763</sup> *Settlements*, II, VII, chapter II, pp. 145-146. Following on this flight, Burke argued, was the emigration of the non-conforming ministerial and lay class—an equally important early development for the future of the colonies—as he put it, the established powers in England were not able “to hinder New England from receiving vast reinforcements, as well as of the clergy who were deprived of their livings or not admitted to them for non-conformity, as of such of the laity who adhered to their opinions.” *Ibid*, p. 146.

enthusiasts”; namely, those early settlers in New England whom he argued were “generally persons of a contracted way of thinking.”<sup>764</sup>

For a considerable time, the people of New England had hardly any that deserved the name of a regular form of government. The court took very little care of them.... As they who composed the new colonies were generally persons of a contracted way of thinking and the most violent enthusiasts, they imitated the Jewish polity in almost all respects; and adopted the books of Moses as the law of the land. The first laws which they made were grounded upon them, and were therefore very ill suited to the customs, genius, or circumstances of that country, and of those times; for which reason they have since fallen into disuse.<sup>765</sup>

From the beginnings of the British settlement in North America, Burke noticed a couple of key factors that would recur throughout colonial, and then, later, United States history: the role of evangelical Protestants in fashioning an American identity that was a curiously fervent mix of the law of Moses and the new covenant of Jesus Christ, and the fact that both the character of the colonists, human nature, and the physical environment in which they found themselves best suited a political-economic arrangement based on commerce and not communism.

Burke then advanced his analysis and demonstrated how the Puritan “high spirit,” which was the cause of so much forceful resistance to established orders in the old world, turned with a vengeance upon itself when loosed from those boundaries in the new world. In this context he showed how the negative energy of religious intolerance continued, as it had done in England, to foster a positive result in the peopling and establishment of the American colonies. For, as he observed,

From such a form as this, great religious freedom might, one would have imagined, be well expected. But the truth is, they had no idea at all of such a freedom. The very doctrine of any sort of toleration was so odious to the greater part, that one of the first persecutions set up here was against a small party which arose amongst themselves, who were hardy enough to maintain, that the civil magistrate had no lawful power to use compulsory measure in affairs of religion. After harassing these people by all the vexatious way imaginable, they obliged them to fly out of their jurisdiction. These emigrants settled themselves to the Southward, near Cape Cod, where they formed a new government upon their own principles, and built a town, which they called Providence. This has since made the fourth and smallest, but no the worst inhabited, of the New England governments, called Rhode Island, from an island of that name which forms a part of it. As a persecution gave rise to the first settlement of New

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<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter III, p. 146.

<sup>765</sup> *Settlements*, II, VII, chapter III, pp. 146-148.

England, so a subsequent persecution in this colony gave rise to new colonies, and this facilitated the spreading of the people over the country.<sup>766</sup>

In his *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* written eight years after the publication of the *Settlements*, Burke seemed to have in mind this aspect of Puritanism in early colonial America when he reflected on a similar aspect of recent Irish history carried forward by “some Powers [that] have destroyed their Country by their persecuting spirit”:

This no one can help observing, who has seen our doors kindly and bountifully thrown open to foreign sufferers for conscience, whilst through the same ports were issuing fugitives of our own, driven from their Country for a cause which to an indifferent person would seem to be exactly similar, whilst we stood by, without any sense of impropriety of this extraordinary scene, accusing, and practicing injustice. For my part, there is no circumstance, in all the contradictions of our most mysterious nature, that appears to be more humiliating than the use we are disposed to make of those sad examples, which seem purposely marked for our correction and improvement. Every instance of fury and bigotry in other men, one should think, would naturally fill us with an horror of that disposition: the effect, however, is directly contrary.<sup>767</sup>

Furthermore, as part of the great interest he always had in the historiography of the Irish Rebellion of 1641, Burke, as discussed in chapter two, encouraged and relied on the writing of Dr. John Curry’s studies, *A brief account form the most authentic Protestant writers of the causes, motives, and mischiefs of the Irish Rebellion...* (1747), and its later expanded edition, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Rebellion in 1641* (1775). Curry directly singled out the Puritans as being “the Principal cause of the Irish Rebellion, and Massacre....”<sup>768</sup> Burke would have thus already had a strong bias against the Puritans, or at least have been aware of their fanatical tendencies. The Irish experience of Puritanism colored his interpretation of the American experience of Puritanism, and both experiences impacted his later writing on Ireland, Catholicism, and religious liberty.

In terms of the New England Puritan “hysteria,” which resulted in a kind of “massacre,” Burke considered the political and legal implications of their fervent theology as part of a survey of the laws that the Puritans implemented in New England to establish and secure their “dominion of grace”—a set of resolutions, such as denial of

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<sup>766</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 148-149.

<sup>767</sup> *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws*, WS, IX, pp. 463-464.

<sup>768</sup> See Curry’s, *A brief account form the most authentic Protestant writers of the causes, motives, and mischiefs of the Irish Rebellion...* (London, 1747), p. 65.

civil freedoms, banishment, and even death for “Jesuits and popish priests,” that Burke indicted for being a “complete code of persecution.”<sup>769</sup>

Burke contrasted the Quakers and their tolerant learnedness with his view of the Puritans as benighted. Burke’s understanding of the role of the passions contributed to his ability to put forth a compelling psychology of persecution.<sup>770</sup> He highlighted the subjective nature of religious intolerance and the obscuring pride that crept into those who persecute others in the name of creed—“the cornerstone of all persecution.” When such a policy was pursued and made into a first principle, Burke implied, the conflict of intemperance with the dictates of justice manifested itself in unconscionable acts of cruelty, which in turn undermined the social affections necessary for order and the preservation of liberty. It was Burke’s hope that a wider diffusion of education would be a means for society to put such codes of persecution behind them and avoid the human and societal consequences of “not taking the pains to be acquainted with the grounds of their adversaries tenets.” As he put it,

One may observe, that men of all persuasions confine the word persecution, and all the ill ideas of injustice and violence which belong to it, solely to those severities which are exercised upon themselves, or upon the party they are inclined to favour. Whatever is inflicted upon others, is a just punishment upon obstinate impiety, and not a restraint upon conscientious difference. The persecution we have ourselves suffered, is a good ground for retaliation against an old enemy; and if one of our friends and fellow sufferers should prove so wicked as to quit our cause, and weaken it by his dissention, he deserves to be punished yet more than the old enemy himself. Besides this, the zealous never fail to draw political inferences from religious tenets, by which they interest the magistrate in the dispute; and then to the heat of a religious fervour is added the fury of a party zeal.... The remembrance of the past, the dread of the future, the present ill, will join together to urge them forward to the most violent courses.<sup>771</sup>

Burke believed that such was often a pattern of religious groups toward each other. And so, he assured, “in this respect the New-England people are no worse than the rest of mankind, nor was their severity any just matter of reflection upon that mode of religion which they profess.” The legacy of confessional wars in the seventeenth-century “gave

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<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151: “The constancy of the Quakers under their sufferings [at the hands of the New England Puritans] begot a pity and esteem for their persons, and an approbation of their doctrines; their proselytes increased; the Quakers returned as fast as they were banished.”

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.



way to intra-confessional conflict within states during the eighteenth century.”<sup>772</sup> It was still near history for Burke and his readers, and it left them suspicious of religious fervor. Europe was wearied by the equal opportunity intolerance perpetrated by Catholics and Protestants alike. As Burke, admittedly a man of few dogmas, argued:

No religion whatsoever, true or false, can excuse its own members, or accuse those of any other, upon the score of persecution. The principles which give rise to it are common to all mankind, and they influence them as they are men, and not as they belong to this or that persuasion. In all persuasions the bigots are persecutors; *the men of a cool and reasonable piety are favourers of toleration*; because the former sort of men, not taking the pains to be acquainted with the grounds of their adversaries tenets, conceive them to be so absurd and monstrous, that no man of sense can give into them in good earnest. For which reason they are convinced that some oblique bad motive induces them to pretend to the belief of such doctrines, and to the maintaining of them with obstinacy. This is a very general principle in all religious differences, and it is the corner stone of all persecution.<sup>773</sup>

Ironically, it was also a legacy of the previous century’s religious wars that minority religious sects from within the Protestant Christian tradition began to multiply and take a more active place within more mainline Christian communities. These Protestant “dissenters” benefited from the energy and zeal that often accompanies new expressions of old truths. The multiplication of such dissenting sects, particularly in Britain’s North American colonies gave rise to the mid-eighteenth century evangelical movements of “awakening.” A newly constituted home in a new world without so much of the old world’s conservative social forces combined to unleash waves of fervent religious expression that, through slow and sometimes painful accommodation, would eventually result in policies aimed to secure greater levels of religious liberty.

In his third consecutive chapter dedicated to the New England Puritans and religious persecution, Burke moved from general historical and theoretical observations to an abridged historical sketch. His subject was the “madness” of the Salem witchcraft “delusion.”<sup>774</sup> This chapter of the *Settlements* might be called “Burke’s colonial tragedy,” for it was a historical genre he explicitly adverted to at the outset of his narrative account of the “great cruelties” which were unleashed in Salem.<sup>775</sup> Burke began by stating that

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<sup>772</sup> James E. Bradley, “Toleration and Movements of Christian Reunion, 1660-1789,” in Brown & Tackett, eds., *Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening, and Revolution*, p. 348.

<sup>773</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 152-153. Emphasis added.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*

once the persecutions of other dissenting denominations was completed, the Puritans began to turn inward and began harrying their own: "When the New-England Puritans began to breathe a little from these dissensions, and had their hands tied up from persecuting the Quakers and Anabaptists, they fell not long after into another madness of a yet more extraordinary and dangerous kind, which, like some epidemical disease, ran through the whole country, and which is perhaps one of the most extraordinary delusions recorded in history. This tragedy began in the year 1692."

Burke first chronicled the events that lead up to the Salem witchcraft hysteria and eventual trial. "There is a town in New-England, in which they fanatically called Salem. One Paris was the minister there.<sup>776</sup> He had two daughters troubled with convulsions; which being attended with some of those extraordinary appearances not unfrequent in such disorders, he imagined they were bewitched." Soon enough, the imaginations of the Puritan's in Salem became "sufficiently heated," and at that point Burke began his evocative account of this "popular madness":

However, as this example set the discourse about witchcraft afloat, some people, troubled with a similar complaint, began to fancy themselves bewitched too. Persons in an ill state of health are naturally fond of finding out causes for their distempers; especially such as are extraordinary, and call the eyes of the public upon them. There was perhaps something of malice in the affair besides. For one of the first objects whom they fixed upon was Mr. Burroughs,<sup>777</sup> a gentlemen who had formerly been minister of Salem; but, upon some of the religious disputes which divided the country, he differed with his flock and left them. This man was tried with two others for witchcraft...and the verdict founded upon it, this minister, a man of a most unexceptionable character, and two others, men irreproachable in their lives, were sentenced to die, and accordingly hanged. Then these victims of the popular madness were stript naked, and their bodies thrown into a pit, half covered with earth, and left to the discretion of birds and wild beasts. Upon the same evidence, in a little time after, sixteen more suffered death; the greatest part of them dying in the most exemplary sentiments of piety, and with the strongest professions of their innocence. One man, refusing to plead, suffered in the cruel manner the law directs on that occasion, by a slow pressure to death.<sup>778</sup>

Burke then proceeded to narrate some of the dreadful scenes in ways reminiscent of his treatment of the native Amerindians' cruel ceremonies and awful rituals:

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<sup>776</sup> Rev. Samuel Parris (1653-1720) Parris had a Carib slave woman named Tituba. Burke referred to Parris' "two daughters," when he probably meant Parris' daughter, Betty, and his niece, Abigail Williams. See Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York, 2002), pp. 18-28.

<sup>777</sup> Rev. George Burroughs (1650-1692) was the only minister to suffer death during the Salem hysteria.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-158.

The imaginations of the people, powerfully affected by these shocking examples, turned upon nothing but the most gloomy and horrid ideas. The most ordinary and innocent actions were metamorphosed into magical ceremonies, and the fury of the people augmented in proportion as this gloom of imagination increased. The flame spread with rage and rapidity into every part of the country. Neither the tenderness of youth, nor the infirmity of age, nor the honour of sex, nor the sacredness of the ministry, nor the respectable condition of fortune or character, was the least protection. Children of eleven years old were taken up for sorceries. The women were stripped in the most shameful manner to search them for magical teats. The scorbutic stains common on the skins of old persons, were called the devil's pinches. This was indisputable evidence against them. As such they admitted every idle flying report, and even stories of ghosts, which they honoured with a name, not found in our law books. They called them *Spectral Evidence*. What these extraordinary testimonies wanted was completed by the torture, by which a number of these unhappy victims were driven to confess whatever their tormenters thought proper to dictate to them. Some women owned they had been lain with by the devil, and other things equally ridiculous and abominable.<sup>779</sup>

Burke drew on all of his aesthetic understanding to craft an emotional and compelling narrative framework that surely would have shocked the sensibilities of his more refined readers. And this is likely what Burke set out to do; not simply for the sake of sensationalism (which could help sales) but more importantly because it served his objective of holding a mirror up to the British public. The excesses of the Puritans might have served as a proxy for the British terror in Ireland, which was sadly advanced by Irish surrogates, as well as for the Establishment persecution of non-conforming Christians in England. It also might serve to remind readers just how close to the savage even contemporary white Christian Europeans were, and thus what a fragile achievement civilizations and their constitutions were. As mentioned above, Burke was always cognizant of the need for persons to renew their social attachments, and appalling narratives such as this one might give a modest jolt to complacency.

After all, Burke highlighted the irony of Englishmen persecuted by Englishmen coming to the New World to escape such bigotry only to carry the virus of religious intolerance to a virgin soil where it quickly spread throughout a new body of Englishmen. However, as Burke would demonstrate in this and ensuing chapters, this madness was not to be a permanent fixture in America. Their freedom from established institutions in their new land may have been the proximate cause of this episode of religious fanaticism, but

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<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*

this same social fact worked over the long term to lead these “new” Englanders to adopt a different model: one of religious liberty.

The march toward acceptance and eventual practice of such tolerance was slow and uneven. At this stage in its history it was not at all clear that the Americans would overcome the kinds of societal dysfunction that followed from the unhealthy religious psychology at the center of their zeal. But as religious fanaticism circled like a boomerang back onto the authorities of this Massachusetts settlement themselves, commonsense and sanity finally prevailed. The want of political prudence was overcome, and the Salem tragedy came to an end. With Salem at its low point, in a “deplorable state,” Burke argued that it was not difficult to imagine

when all mens lives depended upon the caprice and folly of diseased and distracted minds; when revenge and malice had a full opportunity of wreaking themselves in a most dreadful and bloody manner, by an instrument that was always in readiness, and to which the public phrenzy gave a certain and dangerous effect. What was a yet worse circumstance, the wretches who suffered the torture, being not more pressed to own themselves guilty that to discover their associates and accomplices, unable to give any real account, named people at random, who were immediately taken up, and treated in the same cruel manner upon this extorted evidence. An universal terror and consternation seized upon all. Some prevented accusation, and charged themselves with witchcraft, and so escaped death. Others fled the province; and many more were preparing to fly.

Ironically, it was some of the leading thinkers and moralists of Salem and all of New England that stoked the flames of this public frenzy, which left the rank and file without prudent and wise leadership which otherwise might have stepped in to cool heated passions. Once again, Burke made clear that even in the most thoroughly modern persons there existed a primal heart of darkness beneath the surface. Habits, customs, laws, institutions, religion, and manners were the best means to drape the window into this part of human nature and human past.

The magistrates and ministers, whose prudence ought to have been employed in healing this distemper and assuaging its fury, threw in new combustible matter. They encouraged the accusers; they assisted at the examinations, and they extorted the confessions of the witches. None signaled their zeal more upon this occasion than Sir William Phips,<sup>780</sup> the governor, a New-England man, of the lowest birth, and yet meaner education; who having raised a sudden fortune

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<sup>780</sup> Sir William Phips (1651-1695) was the colonial governor of Massachusetts at this time. He was a well-intentioned but ineffectual leader during a time when far-sighted and courageous persons were needed. Cotton Mather wrote his biography, *Life of His Excellency Sir William Phips* (London, 1697).

by a lucky accident, was knighted, and afterwards made governor of the province. Doctor Increase Mather, and Doctor Cotton Mather,<sup>781</sup> the pillars of the New-England church, were equally sanguine.... A few cool moments shewed them the gross and stupid error that had carried them away, and which was utterly invisible to them all the while they were engaged in this strange persecution. They grew heartily ashamed of what they had done.... A general fast was appointed; praying God to pardon all the errors of his servants and people in a late tragedy, raised amongst them by Satan and his instruments.<sup>782</sup>

Burke appended a kind of epilogue in the form of a summary observation of the Salem madness and a consideration of the power that inheres in a “story,” especially in some cases of a “weak, improbable, and inconsistent” story. Moreover, somewhat like native savages in the Americas and elsewhere, these same Massachusetts Puritans gradually became more civil as their experiences combined with the fact that institutions and social forces were beginning to take root and hold in the colonies and produced a series of manners that over time could be an internal check against future social “paroxysms.” As Burke put it upon reflection of these “remarkable sallies of the human mind”:

This was the last paroxysm of the puritanic enthusiasm in New England. This violent fit carried off so much of that humour, that the people there are now grown somewhat like the rest of mankind in their manners, and have much abated of their persecuting spirit. It is not an incurious speculation to consider these remarkable sallies of the human mind, out of its ordinary course. Whole nations are often carried away by what would never influence one man of sense. The cause is originally weak, and to be suppressed without great difficulty; but then its weakness prevents any suspicion of the mischief, until it is too late to think of suppressing it at all.<sup>783</sup>

Burke’s “colonial tragedy” is a remarkable piece of compact history. All of his Irish experiences and education, all of the literary, historical, and interpretive skills he had developed, combined in this episode and demonstrated Burke’s aversion to any manifestation of “a persecuting spirit.” His experience of intolerance and irrationality—“popular madness”—in Irish society under the Penal Laws lurked in the shadows of this

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<sup>781</sup> Rev. Cotton Mather (1663-1728) was an influential Puritan clergyman and writer with scientific inclinations. He presided over Rev. Burroughs’ hanging, even encouraging it when the crowds of Salem faltered in their frenzy. How was it that he and his father, Rev. Increase Mather (1639-1723), two who otherwise would be considered among the most enlightened of late seventeenth-century colonial Americans, presided over and even incited such irrationality? Had Burke considered it in the 1790s, such figures were American precursors to French Jacobin men of learning and science who would march undeserving victims to the guillotine. See Robert Middlekauf, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York, 1971).

<sup>782</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 158-161.

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-152



account and this terror. And the dynamic interplay and ongoing presence of barbarism (intolerance/irrationality/ imprudence) and civilization (toleration/rationality/prudence) was set in the context of conquest and colonialization. The twist Burke introduced was that his eighteenth-century readers cannot assume that “they,” the conquered, are the barbarians while “we,” the colonizing conquerors, are the civilized. For the presence of both barbarity and rationality are present in the Salem tragedy. The former is as much a legacy of England as is the latter. Importantly, however, it was only in the “new” world where the barbarian in “us” was purged. In a land devoid of civilization and the institutions that govern it, one discovers in the workings of history the emergence of a check on old world incivility and the advance of something new.

That something new—religious freedom—was a defining characteristic of Burke’s America. After completing his survey of the legacy of religious intolerance in Puritan Massachusetts, he moved southward down the colonial coast extolling the individual and societal benefits of religious liberty. About Rhode Island, for example, he noted that, “In this province is an unlimited freedom of religion, agreeable to the first principles of its foundation; and though very small, it is from thence extremely well populated.”<sup>784</sup> Similarly, about New York he commended the “great freedom of society” enjoyed in that colony, a principal benefit being that “the entry to foreigners [is] made easy by a general toleration of all religious persuasions.”<sup>785</sup>

Throughout his “abridgement” of America’s history Burke argued that the unique contribution Britain made to the process of the settling of the America’s was to “display the effects of liberty.”<sup>786</sup> However, he cautioned that while the spiritedness which was so much a part of the beneficial aspect of colonial liberty, it also presented problems for political short and long term peace within the empire if a wiser plan of management was not developed. Burke’s sense of foreboding in this regard was demonstrated in his concern for the “unbounded freedom” that he believed was characteristic of the charter form of colonial administration. Again, as they were for the Spanish in Mexico and Peru, great men of principle and vision would be for Burke essential to the just and mutually beneficial settlement of colonial British America. As such, Burke’s model of British colonialism was, therefore, aristocratic rather than democratic.

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<sup>784</sup> *Settlements*, II, pp. 170-171.

<sup>785</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>786</sup> *Settlements*, Part VI, p. 201.

Burke had a particular appreciation for the contribution made by the founders of the middle colonies of British North America. He was critical of the Puritan legacy in New England and the slave-holding tradition in the southern colonies. In the middle colonies, he discovered and approved of a more dynamic interplay between religions, races, and classes. His analysis hinged on his reading of two leading colonial American founders: William Penn (1644-1718) and Cæcilius Calvert, 2nd Baron Baltimore, better known to history as Lord Baltimore (1605-1675). In Penn and Lord Baltimore, Burke supplied English parallels to Cortés and de Castro. And his account of the settlement of Pennsylvania and Maryland are comparable to his story of the Mexican and Peruvian conquest. The principal difference here is the centrality of religious freedom to his “characters” of Penn and Baltimore.

The settlement of Pennsylvania by the Quaker explorer William Penn was for Burke an “illustrious exception” to the shortcomings of and abuses he believed were a regular aspect of proprietary government as a form of colonial administration.<sup>787</sup> Burke believed that any deficiencies Penn might have possessed as an original thinker or writer of lasting merit were more than compensated by the purposes to which his subject put his capacious learning: the design of a just, moderate, and representative frame of government. As Burke wrote, Penn, “in his capacity of a legislator and the founder of so flourishing a commonwealth...deserves great honour amongst all mankind....”<sup>788</sup> Burke believed that, ironically, the passive Quaker spirit, with its attendant magnanimity, was better suited to settlement among a “fierce and lawless” Native American population than was “policy and arms.”<sup>789</sup> Burke also lauded Penn’s “extensive views” in his understanding of the benefits to religious brethren and his home country of American settlement, as well as by his shrewdness in acquiring and securing land. As he put it, “when, for his father’s services and by his own interest at court, he obtained the inheritance of this country and its government, saw that he could make the grant of value to him only by rendering the country as agreeable to all people, as ease and good government could make it. To this purpose, he began by purchasing the soil, at a very low rate indeed, from the original possessors, to whom it was of little use. By this cheap act of justice at the beginning, he made all his dealings for the future the more easy, by prepossessing the Indians with a

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<sup>787</sup> *Ibid*, chapter xi, p. 195. Also see, chapter xxx, pp. 298-299.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196.

<sup>789</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xi, p. 196.

favourable opinion of him and his designs.”<sup>790</sup> The sum of Penn’s achievement, and the source of his lasting greatness, though, was his model governing charter, and the generosity of spirit that it incarnated. Burke’s admiration for Penn’s legislative and principled commitment to religious toleration was feelingly conveyed:

The other part of his plan, which was, to people this country after he had secured the possession of it, he saw much facilitated by the uneasiness of his brethren the Quakers in England, who, refusing to pay tythes and other church dues, suffered a great deal from the spiritual courts. Their high opinion of and regard for the man, who was an honour to their new church, made them the more ready to follow him over the vast ocean into an untried climate and country.... But what crowned all was, that noble charter of privileges, by which he made them as free as any people in the world; and which has since drawn such vast numbers, of so many different persuasions and such various countries, to put themselves under the protection of his laws. He made the most freedom, both religious and civil, the basis of this establishment; and this has done more towards the settling of the province, and towards the settling of it in a strong and permanent manner, than the wisest regulation could have done upon any other plan. All persons who profess to believe one God, are freely tolerated; those who believe in Jesus Christ, of whatever denomination, are not excluded from employments and posts.<sup>791</sup>

Burke’s summary of Penn’s achievement is reminiscent in pace, substance, and style to his perorations on Cortez, Almagro, Pizarro, de Castro, and de la Gasca, right down to his tragic end.<sup>792</sup> As such, it forms an important link between Burke’s South and North American, Spanish and English American “characters”; a bond that reinforces for the reader a view of colonization and empire that emphasizes similarity and common natures through the lives of large- and narrow-souled colonizers, while at the same time cherishes and respects difference and cultural complexity (for principled and practical reasons) and a policy that follows from such an understanding.

Burke, thus, believed it was to William Penn that Pennsylvania owed it first and principal attribute, “the variety of nations and religions there.” He marveled at the ability of so many different Christian sects to peacefully co-exist in that colony: “Pennsylvania is inhabited by upwards of two hundred and fifty thousand people, half of whom are Germans, Swedes, or Dutch. Here you see the Quakers, Churchmen, Calvinists, Lutherans, Catholics, Methodists, Menists, Moravians, Independents, the Anabaptists, and the Dumplers, a sort of German sect, that live in something like a religious society,

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<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–198.

<sup>792</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198, compared with *Settlements*, I, chapter xiv, p.126; chapter xviii, p. 165.

wear long beards, and a habit resembling that of friars. In short, the diversity of people, religions, nations, and languages here, is prodigious, and the harmony in which they live together no less edifying.”<sup>793</sup>

Burke found another model for Enlightened colonialism in the character of Lord Baltimore.<sup>794</sup> Here, Burke’s empathy for his Catholic fellow-countrymen in Ireland was projected upon American soil in the exploration of a better model for the treatment of Papists: one founded on religious liberty, toleration, and constancy of concern for the benefit and the good of all.

For Burke, this sketch was a New World means by which he could indirectly indict Old World anti-Catholicism, particularly as codified in the Elizabethan settlement’s bigoted ~~proclivity~~<sup>92.43</sup>, the Penal Laws (the negative effect of which he referred to in the *Settlements*).<sup>795</sup> It was in the harshness and keen “temper” of these laws, as well as the general “odium” experienced by English Catholics as a result, that Burke located the salutary origins of the Maryland settlement.<sup>796</sup> His opinion of the treatment of Catholics during the reign of Charles I was generally positive.<sup>797</sup> He credited Charles’ court for making a prudent compromise: offsetting its inability to soften the laws at home against Catholics by allowing Lord Baltimore to settle an “asylum” for “Papists” abroad.<sup>798</sup> Whatever the inclinations of the more far-sighted members of the court might have been, institutional and societal forces forbade reform at this time. This was especially so given the zeal and rising influence of the Puritans.<sup>799</sup> As a consequence, Lord Baltimore “was induced to attempt this settlement in America, in hopes of enjoying liberty of conscience for himself, and for such of his friends to whom the severity of the laws might loosen

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<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 199. For a similar treatment of Pennsylvania by Burke compare with the 1759 volume of the *Annual Register* and its chronicle of the Dumplers in Ephrata, Pennsylvania (the heart of Lancaster County’s Dutch/Mennonite population).

<sup>794</sup> *Settlements*, II, VII, chapter xviii, pp. 226-233.

<sup>795</sup> See *Settlements*, II, pp. 227, 231.

<sup>796</sup> “The laws were still executed with very little mitigation; and they were in themselves of a much keener temper, than those which had driven the Puritans about the same time to seek a refuge in the same part of the world. These reasons made lord Baltimore desirous to have, and the court willing to give him, a place of retreat in America.” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 227.

<sup>797</sup> “The court at that time was certainly very little inclined to treat the Roman Catholicks in a harsh manner, neither had they in reality the least appearance of reason to do so; but the laws themselves were of a rigorous constitution; and however the court might be inclined to relax them, they could not in policy do it but with great reserve.” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 227.

<sup>798</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, pp. 231, 227.

<sup>799</sup> “The Puritan party perpetually accused the court, and indeed the Episcopal church, of a desire of returning to Popery; and this accusation was so popular, that it was not in the power of the court to shew the Papists that indulgence which they desired.” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 227.

their ties to their country....”<sup>800</sup> Maryland was to be built on the principle of religious toleration, in which settlers could find relief from “the sharpness of the laws, and the popular odium which hung over them.” Indeed, in this American colony, Catholics subjected to the onerous Penal Laws had an opportunity for a new beginning, “a place of retreat in America,” should they “prefer an easy banishment with freedom, to the conveniencies of England,” one that institutional forces prevented from occurring at home.<sup>801</sup>

Having secured a “retreat” in America for Britain’s Catholic subjects, the nature of Lord Baltimore’s act of colonial settlement was sympathetically portrayed. And in so doing Burke once again highlighted the complicated relationship that exists between barbarism and civilization, especially when charting new settlements and encountering an unknown “other” in the form of indigenous native peoples and cultures. It was thus not surprising how much interest Burke displayed in the manner by which the white Catholics and native Indians encountered each other “with little offence.”<sup>802</sup> As he noted, this was a marked difference from the white Protestant settlers of America: “This settlement, at the beginning, did not meet with the same difficulties, which embarrassed and retarded most of the others we had made.”<sup>803</sup> Burke attributed this, in part, to the fact that the Catholic refugees were “of good families” and “generally of the better sort”; and that, given the hierarchical and aristocratic form of their religion, “a proper subordination was observed amongst them.”<sup>804</sup> Beyond imperial administrators and related officials, men and women of good breeding in England were not inclined nor encouraged, generally speaking, to leave and make their way in British North America. Protestant Britain sent over its religious and political “outsiders,” as well as those facing civil or criminal punishment. At their best, the Catholic settlers had the native ability, education, and experience of being themselves oppressed to have sympathy for the New World natives they came to live with or near. They were able to cede a dignity and a natural rank to the natives that Protestant settlers found more difficult to do, as they tended to bring with them typically British constructions of the native “other” in the Americas as merely savage and pagan or, worse, subhuman and soulless creatures.

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<sup>800</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, pp. 226-227.

<sup>801</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 227.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*



For Burke, then, the initial settlement in Maryland presented a different model from other British colonies, one in which Catholicism and religious toleration defined the experiment. Not surprising, according to Burke, this more humane form of settlement conformed best to nature and therefore yielded the best social results. As he observed, “the Indians gave and took so little offence, that they ceded one half of their principal town, and some time after the whole of it, to these strangers. The Indian women taught ours how to make bread of their corn; their men went out to hunt and fish with the English; they assisted them in the chase, and sold them the game they took themselves for a trifling consideration; so that the new settlers had a sort of town ready built, ground ready cleared for their subsistence, and no enemy to harass them.”<sup>805</sup> The principal enemy for Catholic and Indian alike was Old World anti-Catholicism, a narrow spirit that ironically had been transported to the New World in the same boats that carried refugees from religious persecution.<sup>806</sup> As Burke put it, the Catholic Marylanders and the Amerindians “lived thus, without much trouble or fear, until some ill-disposed persons in Virginia insinuated to the Indians, that the Baltimore colony had designs upon them; that they were Spaniards and not Englishmen; and such other stories as they judged proper to sow the seeds of suspicion and enmity in the minds of these people.” Thus, while the Marylanders were endeavoring to “plant” the seeds of toleration as much as of corn, the weeds of English anti-Catholicism also appeared.

However, Burke noted that such “malice” did not take an early root in Maryland. Instead, as with the Quakers in Pennsylvania, the Catholics in Maryland won their peace through their generosity and humanity in colonizing alongside the native American population, less than through “policy and arms” as he put it in his sketch of the Quakers and William Penn.<sup>807</sup> This, indeed, was the lesson Burke derived from what he saw as a treacherous episode: “Upon the first appearance, that the malice of the Virginians had taken effect, the new planters were not wanting to themselves. They built a good fort with all expedition, and took every other necessary measure for their defence; but they continued still to treat the Indians with so much kindness, that, partly by that and partly

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<sup>805</sup> *Settlements*, p. 228.

<sup>806</sup> “The laws were still executed with very little mitigation; and they were in themselves of a much keener temper, than those which had driven the Puritans about the same time to seek a refuge in the same part of the world.” *Settlements*, p. 227.

<sup>807</sup> *Settlements*, 196.

by the awe of their arms, the ill designs of their enemies were defeated.”<sup>808</sup> It is indeed striking and instructive that Burke’s model settlers or conquerors in the New World were Pennsylvania Quakers and Maryland Catholics. This reflected his own upbringing and Irish sympathies precisely and here, perhaps for the first time, he was able to locate in another land a positive model for assimilation and treatment of both the religious and social “other” at home as well as the native and “savage” “other” in America. A point manifest throughout the pages of the *Settlements* was that a colonial encounter “wisely” pursued with these positive models in mind will reap commercial and political advantages for the home country.<sup>809</sup> It was thus right in itself, but equally important for Burke, it was practically advantageous, too.

The origins of the Maryland settlement having been explored and explained,<sup>810</sup> Burke summarily moved to the next stage in the history of this colony: turmoil during the period of the English Civil War (1642-1651). Due to the fact that the “Roman Catholics in England were yet more severely treated” as the reign of Charles I was replaced by the usurping Cromwell, “numbers constantly arrived to replenish the settlement.”<sup>811</sup> At this time, “the usurpation [of Cromwell] overturned the government at home, and deprived [Baltimore] of his rights abroad.” Baltimore lost Maryland for a time, but during the Restoration this wrong was righted, and “lord Baltimore was re-instated in his former possessions, which he cultivated with his former wisdom, care, and moderation.” The proof of this Burke celebrated in enactment of the first New World, and the first ever British, legal charter securing religious liberty for all Christians: the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649. In the context of lauding the “mild and equitable administration” of Lord Baltimore, Burke documented the great achievement of this American “character.” In the colony of Maryland at this time, he wrote,

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<sup>808</sup> *Settlements*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>809</sup> “... in the various changes which our religion and government have undergone, which have in their turns rendered every sort of party and religion obnoxious to the reigning powers, that this American asylum, which has been admitted in the hottest times of persecution at home, has proved of infinite service, not only to the present peace of England, but to the prosperity of its commerce and the establishment of its power.” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 232.

<sup>810</sup> Burke considers the Baltimore’s purpose and motivation in settling Maryland as being principally religious. This would seem to indicate Edmund’s hand as most commentators since have focused even more so on the economic motivations of the Calverts. See Iva L. Peters, “A Social Interpretation: Maryland,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (March 1926), 511; John D. Krugler, “Cecil Calvert,” *American National Biography*, Volume 3 (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>811</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 229.

No people could live in greater ease and security; and his lordship, willing that as many as possible should enjoy the benefits of his mild and equitable administration, gave his consent to an act of assembly, which he had before promoted in his province, for allowing a free and unlimited toleration for all who professed the Christian religion of whatever denomination. This liberty, which was never in the least instance violated, encouraged a great number, not only of the Church of England, but of Presbyterians, Quakers, and all kinds of Dissenters, to settle in Maryland, which before that was almost wholly in the hands of Roman Catholics.<sup>812</sup>

Burke, however, introduced an ironic twist to his story of Maryland's settlement. As this triumph for liberty advanced in the American middle colonies it was suddenly derailed at by James II, the king and co-religionist to whom Lord Baltimore was "firmly attached." According to Burke,

This lord, though guilty of no mal-administration in his government, though a zealous Roman Catholic, and firmly attached to the cause of king James the second, could not prevent his charter from being questioned in that arbitrary reign, and a suit from being commenced, to deprive him of the property and jurisdiction of a province granted by the royal favour, and peopled at such a vast expence of his own. But it was the error of that weak and unfortunate reign, neither to know its friends, nor its enemies; but, by a blind precipitate conduct, to hurry on every thing of whatever consequence with almost equal heat, and to imagine that the sound of the royal authority was sufficient to justify every sort of conduct to every sort of people. But these injuries could not shake the honour and constancy of lord Baltimore, nor tempt him to desert the cause of his master. Upon the revolution, he had no reason to expect any favour; yet he met with more than king James had intended him; he was deprived indeed of all his jurisdiction, but he was left the profits of his province, which were by no means inconsiderable; and when his descendents had conformed to the Church of England, they were restored to all their rights as fully as the legislature has thought fit that any proprietor should enjoy them.<sup>813</sup>

Indeed, the contrast between the constancy that characterized leaders of "comprehensive views" and "disinterested spirits" and the narrow self-interest that animated the inconstant personality was a theme and device that Burke made effective use of in his American character sketches. This was especially evident in his portrayal of the constancy of Lord Baltimore and the inconstancy of James II. But in this case it had the added practical, political benefit of taking the edge off Burke's championing of Catholic colonization, for it was a Catholic and not a Protestant that undid the foundations of Baltimore's enlightened settlement. Burke's anti-hero was the "arbitrary" and "weak"

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<sup>812</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, pp. 229-230.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

James II, and that fact provided Burke the opportunity to suggest that it would be in the succeeding Williamite Settlement of 1688 that one should look for the principles that could yet form the basis of a wise and salutary colonial policy. This was all the more easily made in this case because Baltimore's descendants conformed to the Established Church. And so we again find in this story of Maryland's settlement suggestive parallels from Burke's life: his own family on his father's side having conformed to the Established Church near the same time as the Calvert's did and for much the same reasons: land, place, and the prospects for securing the fruits of their inheritance.

The unhappy fate of Maryland's toleration policy, which was overturned by militant Protestants five years later, Burke believed, was due in no small part to successive revolutions in England. In imitation, a vigorous wave of intolerance was introduced in colonial British America as the Catholics were expelled from Maryland. Britain's colonies mirrored, and sometimes intensified, the shortcomings as much as the strengths of their mother country—including going so far as to adopt “the whole body” of English penal laws.<sup>814</sup> Burke here made the further point that religious persecution leads to fanaticism, which then leads to war and violence—which disproportionately affects the weaker and marginalized members of society. For Burke, Pennsylvania and Maryland had the “honour” of being “unstained” in this way.<sup>815</sup>

Burke, however, worried in the pages of the *Settlements* that, “This present war indeed has changed every thing, and the Indians have been taught to laugh at all their antient alliances.”<sup>816</sup> He detected early on that the commencement of the French and Indian War was destroying or potentially destroying the harmony of an older order: one characterized by toleration, peace, prosperity, and security. Anti-French and anti-Catholic

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<sup>814</sup> “When, upon the revolution, power changed hands in that province, the new men made but an indifferent requital for the liberties and indulgences they had enjoyed under the old administration. They not only deprived the Roman Catholics of all share in the government, but all the rights of freemen; they have even adopted the whole body of the penal laws of England against them; they are at this day meditating new laws in the same spirit....” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 231. Still, the enlightened legacy of Lord Baltimore and the families who settled Maryland is not without its positive impact even on its Established Church inheritors: “The people of Maryland have the same established religion with those of Virginia, that of the Church of England; but here the clergy are provided for in a much more liberal manner, and they are the most decent, and the best of the clergy in North America.” *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 233.

<sup>815</sup> *Settlements*, chapter xviii, p. 232.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid.* For confirmation that this was one legacy of the French and Indian War, see Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America* (New York, 2000), p. 471. Burke, for instance, would later write alarmingly of “The savage war, which has unfortunately broke out in America since the conclusion of the general peace....” *The Annual Register*, 1763, p. 15.

sentiment at home and in the colonies, his argument implied, may be having the detrimental side effect of weakening the foundations of toleration in places like Pennsylvania and Maryland. Burke thought that an unforeseen consequence of this may well be the weakening of the social bonds of community thus putting it at greater risk from the physical danger of internal and external assault. He thus believed that a dynamic interplay existed between authentic religious diversity and the strength, security, and vigor of community. It was yet another reason why religious liberty was such a central focus of his social philosophy. And more significantly for our purpose, it was the manner in which such issues were so starkly played out in the American colonies that largely accounted for his keen interest in that quarter of the globe.

And so at the end of his “character” sketch of Lord Baltimore and the settlement of Maryland, as it was with de Castro and de la Gasca in Peru, Baltimore’s legacy of toleration and equitable governance helped to create the conditions necessary for personal and societal flourishing; and in so doing also sowed the seeds for liberty’s abuse. It was in this context that an aristocracy, either of birth or of enlightened “new men,” and composed of leaders that possessed extended, disinterested views, was critical to Burke’s idea of colonization and empire.

The wholesale abandonment of Maryland’s early tradition of religious toleration was fortunately, as Burke observed, checked by the government in England, who had the good sense to understand the social and commercial benefits of having a colonial “asylum” to send dissenters and non-conformists of all sects should their zeal for absolute liberty be deemed a threat to order at home. Still, the new Episcopal administration in Maryland did not act with the same degree of magnanimity that characterized the previous Catholic administration. Interestingly, Burke argued that it seemed to be in the nature of sectarian religious ideology, “zeal” as he commonly referred to it, to narrow the horizon of liberty as part of an argument for the necessity to expand it. Here we find an early hint of his eventual distrust of political men of letters during the French Revolution. Such dissenting and, to Burke, disloyal forces to the inherited social fabric, were the heirs to the spirit displayed at times on these pristine new shores with all its natural force, the spirit of “a party liberty...a liberty, which they would stretch out one way only to narrow it in another.”<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*



Burke's assessment of the people in Virginia was based in part on their commitment to toleration, here of a religious kind but later of a racial kind as well: "The inhabitants of Virginia are a cheerful, hospitable, and many of them a genteel, though something vain and ostentatious people; they are for the greater part of the established church of England; nor until lately did they tolerate any other."<sup>818</sup> What religious diversity lately the Virginians had deemed to tolerate he observed with what could only have been a personal interest. For the numbers of "white people" increasing dramatically in Virginia, Burke contended, was due to "the migration of the Irish, who, not succeeding so well in Pennsylvania as the more frugal and industrious Germans, sell their lands in that province to the latter, and take up new ground in the remote countries of Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. There are chiefly Presbyterians from the Northern part of Ireland, who in America are generally called Scotch Irish."<sup>819</sup> It was thus the influx of Scotch Irish that forced the haughty natives of Virginia to make their peace with religious liberty.

Burke began his survey of the Carolinas by noting the beneficial effects of toleration, both for a colonizing country attempting to deal with dissenting religious minorities at home dissatisfied with the established order and for the paradoxically beneficial creative energy such restless dissidents brought to the task of colonial settlement abroad. He did so with reference to the French, and drew lessons from their "bigotry" for his contemporary audience:

[H]appily for us, the French court did not understand, blinded as they were by their bigotry, the advantages which might have been derived from giving America to the Protestants, as we afterwards did to the Dissenters, as a place of refuge....<sup>820</sup>

Burke again observed that toleration and moderation are the basis of English success in North America. The French, and earlier the Spaniards, were too bigoted or blinded or hungry for gold and riches alone to see its true value. But in colonies like the Carolinas, the English Whig elites had found a place in the new world to model after their own lofty principles. Burke invoked John Locke and his patrons as the principal source for seeding the Carolinas at their origin with the spirit of toleration and enlightened constitutionalism:

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<sup>818</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 217.

<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>820</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 236.

It was not until the year 1663, in the reign of Charles the second, that we had any notion of formally settling the country. In that year, the earl of Clarendon lord chancellor, the duke of Albemarle, the lord Craven, lord Berkley, lord Ashley, afterwards earl of Shaftesbury, Sir George Carteret, Sir William Berkley, and Sir George Colleton, obtained a charter for the property and jurisdiction of that country...and being invested with full power to settle and govern the country, they had the model of a constitution framed, and a body of fundamental laws compiled, by the famous philosopher Mr. Locke.<sup>821</sup>

After languishing from Spanish and French inattention, and abandoned by the English after a false start initiated by Walter Raleigh, a group of “lords proprietors” formally settled Carolina for the English in 1663. Among the notable eight names included on Burke’s list of enlightened “founders” of the Carolinas was Sir George Carteret. The inclusion of Carteret’s name, while justified on the merits, would have given Burke the opportunity to impress Lord Granville, Viscount John Carteret, the son of Sir George Carteret and, as argued earlier, a possible patron of Burke’s plan “shortly, please God, to be in America.”<sup>822</sup> Burke did not miss the opportunity to characterize the Carolinas as an offspring of great men possessed of “comprehensive views,”<sup>823</sup> and including Lord Granville’s father prominently in that number might well have been calculated to impress the Earl and encourage a land grant offer or other such assistance.<sup>824</sup> Burke also implicitly credited “the earl Granville” for not abandoning the Carolinas in 1728, as did the other original proprietors, when the Crown assumed governing authority due to internal “distractions” caused by two violent wars with the Native Americans that were actually instigated by settlers displeased with proprietary rule. The Crown quickly divided the Carolina province into “two distinct independent governments,” and Lord Granville, Burke noted, “kept his eighth part of the property, which comprehends very near half of North Carolina, on that part which immediately borders upon the province of Virginia.”<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237. This passage is followed by a description of Locke’s Carolina constitution, in which the architect appointed two branches of government “in a good measure analogous to the legislature in England,” dividing the propertied franchise into “three ranks, or rather classes of nobility” that formed an upper and a lower house. The whole plan “was not called, as in the rest of the plantations, an assembly, but a parliament.” *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>822</sup> Burke to Shackleton, 10 August 1757, *Correspondence*, I, p. 123.

<sup>823</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 234.

<sup>824</sup> In addition to the land grant offer discussed earlier, Burke may well have been writing for Lord Granville. That, at least, is the suggestion of William Dennis—“Ned I fancy writes Pamphlets for the great ones.... He is well known to Lord Granville.” Dennis to Richard Shackleton, 5 August 1758, cited in *Correspondence*, I, p. 124, n. 5.

<sup>825</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 240.

As put forward in chapter two, if circumstances would have allowed Burke to emigrate as he had evidently planned to do in the mid-1750s, this was very likely the area in which he intended to first settle. Indeed, perhaps the combination of impressing John Carteret with his knowledge of the English settlements in general and the Carolinas in particular and, as a result of the Granville connection, Burke's own supposition that should he make for America North Carolina was the likely destination, accounted for the fact that the six chapters devoted to the Carolinas in the *Settlements* are the most chapters devoted to a single settlement. New England merited six chapters as well, but three of those were devoted to Burke's Salem "colonial tragedy," while the other three cover Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Virginia was allotted four chapters, while Pennsylvania got three chapters (as did New York and New Jersey combined). The extended treatment accorded to the Carolinas, then, while initially puzzling makes more sense considering that at the time of the *Settlements*' writing and publication evidence suggests that Burke was very possibly attempting to impress Lord Granville—the patron of the Carolinas—in hope of securing a place there for himself.<sup>826</sup>

And Burke did indeed paint a glowing, if complex, picture of that settlement. He argued in Montesquieuan fashion that the climate was much more "advantageous" and "agreeable" than in the other colonies.<sup>827</sup> In comparing the soil to that of neighboring Virginia, he noted that "where they differ, it is much to the advantage of Carolina, which, on the whole, may be considered as one of the finest climates in the world." He observed that while the heat in the summer was very near the same as in Virginia, "the winters are milder and shorter, and the year, in all respects, does not come to the same violent extremities."<sup>828</sup> Quite the contrary, he reported, as the moderate climate was "inexpressibly temperate and agreeable."<sup>829</sup> In addition, he observed, the "air is pure and wholesome...[and] nothing can be imagined more pleasant to the eye than the back country, and its fruitfulness is almost incredible."<sup>830</sup> As for the land, it "is very easily cleared every where...they can clear in Carolina more land in a week, than in the forests of Europe they can do in a month."<sup>831</sup> And after surveying at length the commodities that

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<sup>826</sup> See discussion in chapter 2 above, Michael Kearney to Edmond Malone, 12 January 1799.

<sup>827</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 237.

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter xxi, p. 241.

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>830</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

Carolina exports with great benefit to the empire, chief among them indigo, rice, pitch, and tar, Burke contended that should the Carolinians “continue to improve” the quality and production of these commodities they will “consequently make their country the richest, as it is the pleasantest and most fertile, part of the British dominions.”<sup>832</sup> In some respects the six chapters in the *Settlements* on Carolina read like an advertisement for would-be settlers. The detailed and fulsome account of the Carolinas would only have pleased Granville—all the more so because Burke situated the agricultural, topographical, and climatic benefits of his proprietary land within a broader envelope of cultural toleration, and hence, of opportunity.

Indeed, Burke’s interest in Carolina was predicated on his appreciation for its declared aspiration to religious toleration. Unlike the French, the political and philosophical founders of the Carolina settlements, given voice by Locke, understood the nature of the advantages to be gained by pursuing a policy of toleration. As Burke stated: “They observed what advantages other colonies derived from opening an harbour for refugees; and, not only from this consideration, but from the humane disposition of that excellent man who formed the model of their government, they gave an unlimited toleration to people of all religious persuasions.” This stated policy of religious liberty “induced a great number of Dissenters...to transport themselves with their fortunes and families to Carolina.” The peppering of this colony with increasing numbers of Dissenters put the reigning “Churchmen” in “Charles-town”—the Province’s capital—on alert. Unfortunately, Burke pointed out that they were not initially able to live up to the ideals expressed in that province’s Whig charter. So that while the immigrant Dissenters who journeyed to the Carolinas “displayed none of that frantic bigotry which disgraced the New England refugees, they could not preserve themselves from the jealousy and hatred and of those of the Church of England, who, having a majority in one of the assemblies, attempted to exclude all Dissenters from a right of sitting there. This produced dissensions, tumults, and riots every day, which tore the colony to pieces, and hindered it for many years from making that progress which might be expected from its great natural advantages.”<sup>833</sup>

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<sup>832</sup> *Ibid*, chapter xxii, p. 253.

<sup>833</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 239.

Once again Burke's point was clear: toleration leads to progress in politics, economics, science, and morality. As he put it plainly in his *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* (1765), "In proportion as mankind has become enlightened, the idea of religious persecution, under any circumstances, has been almost universally exploded by all good and thinking men."<sup>834</sup> The obvious implication for his readers was thus that the opposite was also true: the policy of persecution represented by the spirit, if not always the fact, of the Penal Laws was an agent for social regression and a blueprint for oppression. As he later put it in the *Tracts*, "All religious persecution...is grounded upon a miserable *petitio principii*. You are wrong; I am right; you must come over to me, or you must suffer. Let me add, that the great inlet, by which a colour for oppression here entered into the world, is by one man's pretending to determine concerning the happiness of another, and by claiming a right to use what means he thinks proper in order to bring him to a sense of it. It is the ordinary and trite sophism of oppression."

Burke's remedy for such official oppression? Toleration legally sanctioned: "Every body is satisfied that a conservation and secure enjoyment of our natural rights is the great and ultimate purpose of civil society; and that therefore all forms whatsoever of Government are only good as they are subservient to that purpose, to which they are entirely subordinate."<sup>835</sup> His interest in the complicated relationship that exists between barbarism and civilization, decline and progress, conquest and colonization found an early vehicle for exploration in the history of the settlement of Britain's North American colonies. Burke the later critic of arbitrary rule in colonial America, the champion of Catholic relief in the 1780s, the defender of native cultures in India, and the prophet against revolt in France is readily detectable in sections like these of the *Settlements*

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<sup>834</sup> *WS*, IX, p. 465.

<sup>835</sup> *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* (1765), *WS*, IX, p. 463.



## II.

Burke's tolerant and sympathetic orientation could also manifest itself in appreciative examinations of cultural "others." Macaulay once observed that "Burke was a man in whom compassion for suffering, and hatred of injustice and tyranny, were as strong as in Las Casas or Clarkson...."<sup>836</sup> These words were written upon reflection of Burke's writings on affairs in India, but they also apply to his writings on America; for a central concern in "Burke's America" was with the nature, justice, and effect of political and cultural oppression. Throughout the *Settlements*, Burke displayed moments of great sympathy toward Native American civilizations, if not always altogether admiring of their standard of civilization; and also evidenced a concern for the inhumanity and injustice directed at slaves in the American colonies and argued in favor of gradual abolition once economic and other practical obstacles were removed.

With regard to the latter position, Francis Canavan argues in his editor's introduction to Burke's later *Sketch of a Negro Code* (1780): "It was typical of Burke that he would not change even so evil an institution as slavery suddenly and drastically, but only prudently and through planned stages. But it was also typical of him that he recognized the evil as such and proposed to rid the British Empire of it. It should also be noted that he did not regard the long continuance and legal acceptance of the institution as having created a prescriptive right to it on the part of slave-owners."<sup>837</sup> Luke Gibbons recently echoed this view, "Where Burke went further than many of his contemporaries, however, was in developing an incipient critique not just of the slave trade, but of colonialism."<sup>838</sup> The earliest articulations of Burke's position with regard to "the plight of the Negroe" are found in the pages of the *Settlements*.

The "misery of the negroes" clearly unsettled Burke, and he was candid that his view of the condition of the slaves and the injustice of the institution of slavery itself "may perhaps meet no warm reception from those who are the most nearly concerned." As he observed: "The negroes in our colonies endure a slavery more compleat, and attended with far worse circumstances, than what any people in their condition suffer in any other part of the world, or have suffered in any other period of time.... [I]n our plantations the

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<sup>836</sup> Macaulay's *Miscellaneous Writings*, "Warren Hastings," pp. 631-632.

<sup>837</sup> Canavan, *Select Works*, IV, pp. 253-254.

<sup>838</sup> Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 167.

blacks work severely for five days, without relaxation, or intermission, for the benefit of the master, and the other two days they are obliged to labour for their own subsistence during the rest of the week; and this, I imagine, with the other circumstances of great severity which depress their spirits, naturally cuts off great numbers, as well as disqualifies those who remain from supplying this waste by natural propagation.”<sup>839</sup>

Burke believed that if nothing else, humane treatment of slaves would accrue to more than just the moral benefit of the slaveholder; it also would have a positive economic benefit as the slave would be physically and psychologically able to produce more with his labor. Burke knew that once the slaves were humanized in such a way the end of the evil would be closer in sight. This was a tactical element of his gradualism. Furthermore, he “could not hear without horror” the economically perverse fact that the colonial feeding of the demand for slaves was predicated on the “annual murder of several thousand innocent men.” Given both the moral and economic basis of his objection to the institution of chattel slavery in Britain’s American colonies, Burke in the mid-1750s was operating well ahead of his time. As he put it,

I think it clear from the whole course of history, that those nations which have behaved with the greatest humanity to their slaves, were always best served, and ran the least hazard from their rebellions: And I am the more convinced of the necessity of these indulgences, as slaves certainly cannot go through so much work as freemen. The mind goes a great way in every thing; and when a man knows that his labour is for himself, and that the more he labours, the more he is to acquire, this consciousness carries him through, and supports him beneath fatigues, under which he otherwise would have sunk.... The prejudice this saving would be to the African trade, is, I know, an objection which to some would appear very plausible. But surely, one cannot hear without horror of a trade which must depend for its support upon the annual murder of several thousands of innocent men; and indeed nothing could excuse the slave trade at all, but the necessity we are under of peopling our colonies, and the consideration that the slaves we buy were in the same condition in Africa, either hereditary or taken in war. But, in fact, if the waste of these men should become less, the price would fall; then, if a due order were taken, the same demand might be kept, by extending our colonies, which is now produced by the havock made of the people. This is the case on the continent, where, though the slaves increase, there is an annual call for seven thousand at least.<sup>840</sup>

Burke followed with one of the few specific policy proposals found in the *Settlements*: “The principal time I would have reserved for the indulgence I propose to be granted to

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<sup>839</sup> *Settlements*, II, p. 124.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

the slaves, is Sunday, or the Lord's day; a day which is profaned in a manner altogether scandalous in our colonies." Burke suggested that on this day the slave and his family should attend church and that both should be "carefully (full as carefully as any others) instructed in the principles of religion and virtue." In this way both the slave and his family will be improved for their own sake and for the sake of making use of their future freedom, and in the nearer term provide rationale for their current submission and instill in them the kind of humility that would make any uprising unlikely. Such a policy would also "by degrees habituate their masters, not to think them a sort of beasts, and without souls, as some of them do at present, who treat them accordingly; and the slaves would of course grow more honest, tractable, and less of eye-servants; unless the sanctions of religion, the precepts of morality, and all the habits of an early institution, be of no advantage to mankind."

Burke knew that quite the opposite was the case, which made this a rhetorical question even for his readers.<sup>841</sup> However, he was also realistic about the difficulties in re-orienting the slaveholder's view of the moral and physical value of the individual slave. As he put it, "Their avarice in these particulars makes them blind to the hazards to which they expose the sum total of their affairs. This disposition in the planters is now almost grown inveterate, and to such a degree, that the remedy will probably never be administered by themselves...."<sup>842</sup> As Burke was to make plain in his *Speech on Conciliation with America* two decades later with reference to Virginia, this view applied not just to South American or West Indies Islands slavery, but to slavery in Britain's colonial settlements, too:

I do not mean, Sir, to commend the superior morality of this sentiment, which has at least as much pride as virtue in it; but I cannot alter the nature of man. The fact is so; and these people of the Southern Colonies are much more strongly, and with an higher and more stubborn spirit, attached to liberty, than those to the North-ward. Such were all the ancient commonwealths; such were our Gothick ancestors; such in our days were the Poles; and such will be all masters of slaves, who are not slaves themselves. In such a people, the haughtiness of domination combines with the spirit of freedom, fortifies it, and renders it invincible.<sup>843</sup>

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<sup>841</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 124-130.

<sup>842</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 118.

<sup>843</sup> *Speech on Conciliation with America*, WS, III, p. 122.

Several of Burke's American exemplars were notable for their humanity toward black slaves and Amerindian natives, especially in seeking to extend to them the education and training needed eventually to take their place in the new order advancing around them. Slavery, therefore, was not "natural" for Burke; it was rather a corruption of nature. It was the role of far-sighted figures such as Columbus to resist these corrupting influences and pursue policies meant "to enlighten ignorance, to remove prejudice, and to vanquish that obstinate incredulity, which is of all others the greatest enemy to improvement."<sup>844</sup> For Burke, slavery was a residue of human ignorance, a vestige that must be eliminated if mankind were to advance both materially and spiritually. This view was one reason why abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson (1760-1845) referred to the *Settlements*, and specifically to Edmund Burke's principal role in it, as an important text in the movement to abolish the slave trade.<sup>845</sup>

Burke's belief that the humane treatment of slaves and gradual elimination of the institution of slavery was not only moral but economically prudent places him in the broader tradition of Enlightenment thought. For he believed that toleration of religion and race as a principle led to the practical application of *laissez faire* in the realm of commerce. If the state was to restrain from interfering with religion, it should also do so with regards to economic and political regulation. The assertion "that individuals allowed to choose their own economic self-interest would make choices of benefit not only to themselves but also to society," made by figures associated with the Scottish Enlightenment in particular, Martin Fitzpatrick argues, "gave the idea of free trade in religion a warmer glow."<sup>846</sup> Indeed, Burke held, the connection between economic, political, and religious freedom was a direct one, and that commerce was an important factor in the development of manners. The fundamental legal protection that helped to secure such freedoms was the right to private property, for "a Law," as he put it in the

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<sup>844</sup> Burke was wrong in this regard. In 1494, Columbus sent an unspecified number of Arawaks and 500 Carib Indians captured in war to be sold in the slave markets of Seville, thus originating the Atlantic slave trade, which initially brought slaves from the New World to the Old. See Paolo Emilio Taviani, *Columbus, the Great Adventure: His Life, His Times, and His Voyages* (New York, 1991), pp. 176-178, 183-184, 256.

<sup>845</sup> See Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the rise, progress and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave trade* (London, 1808), volume I, pp. 55-56.

<sup>846</sup> Martin Fitzpatrick, "Toleration and the Enlightenment Movement," p. 29.

*Tracts*, “which shuts out from all secure and valuable property the bulk of the people” is not only unjust, but “repugnant to the essence of Law....”<sup>847</sup>

As discussed at some length in chapter one, trade and commercial policy was a focal point of Burke’s early thought, as it directly impacted local economies and merchants. From his college year’s forward, he was interested in such matters as part of a more comprehensive philosophy of society, an integrated political economy that sought, as he would come to put it, “to *oeconomize by principle*, that is...to put affairs into that train, which experience points out as the most effectual, from the nature of things, and from the constitution of the human mind.”<sup>848</sup> From his Irish experiences, Burke brought to his studies on the American settlements an enthusiasm for understanding the economic dimension of public cares. Near the end of his life, Burke claimed that he had studied “political oeconomy...from my very early youth...even before...it had employed the thoughts of speculative men in other parts of Europe” and the study of which was only “in its infancy in England.” Burke then added that, “Something of these studies may appear incidentally in some of the earliest things I published”<sup>849</sup>—perhaps having to some extent the *Settlements* in mind.

For in the *Settlements*, Burke presented America as a place friendly to upward mobility as well as to economic and political opportunity. In search of place and a promising career in the mid-1750s, Burke was both intrigued intellectually by issues of political economy and motivated personally by economic and political concerns. Burke saw in the Americas a fertile place for charting and applying new economic concepts. Trade theory and policy, as Burke later attested, were always a central interest to him. Burke evidenced this principal concern in an early section of the *Settlements* while discussing the originating spirit of American discovery. “What animated these adventurers, at the same time that it fixes a stain upon all their characters and designs, is that insatiable thirst for gold.... [I]t is certain, that were it not for this incentive...America had never been in the state it now is.... It was necessary there should be something of an immediate and uncommon gain, fitted to strike the imaginations of men forcibly, to tempt

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<sup>847</sup> *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws*, pp. 456-457. For a substantial overview of the place of property in Burke’s political thought see Francis Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke*, pp. 70-96.

<sup>848</sup> *Speech on Economical Reform* (1780), *WS*, III, p. 513.

<sup>849</sup> *A Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796), *Works*, VIII, p. 27.



them to such hazardous designs.”<sup>850</sup> A few sentences later he outlined the historic and theoretical context for the importance of a sound political economy in pursuing American settlement, in words echoing those quoted above from his *Letter to a Noble Lord*:

The speculative knowledge of trade made no part of the study of the elevated or thinking part of mankind, at that time. Now, it may be justly recognized amongst the liberal sciences; and it makes of the most considerable branches of political knowledge. Commerce was then in the hands of the few, great in its profits, but confined in its nature. What we call the ballance of trade, was far from being well understood; all the laws relative to commerce were every where but so many clogs upon it. The imports and duties charged on goods, were laid on without distinction or judgment. Even amongst ourselves, the most trading and reasoning people of Europe, right notions of these matters began late, and advanced slowly.<sup>851</sup>

Burke believed that “right notions” of political economy were sufficiently advanced and available for contemporary colonists and architects of colonial policy to realize the promises of America that history had unfolded throughout the previous 150 years. He knew this was not always so: “Our colonies were settled without any view to those great advantages which we draw from them”—meaning chiefly economic advantages. “Virginia,” he noted, “was constructed out of the wrecks of an armament destined on a golden adventure, which first tempted us to America. And those who settled New England and Maryland, meant them only as asylums from religious persecution. So that if America had not promised such an inundation of treasure, it could only have supplied a languid commerce.... Then it would have been next to impossible to have made those extensive settlements in that new world.”<sup>852</sup>

However Burke saw Providence at work in the Americas, with its “active principle” being the proper understanding of a new political economy that matches reason to experience and produces remarkable and unforeseen opportunity for both colony and colonizer should a wise and prudent imperial management be pursued. This implied for Burke the need to carefully study and map the purposes of colonization and the consequences of colonial policy, always measuring it against experience and results. Burke observed that excepting its original purposes, British policy in the New World has been on the side of Providence. Colonist and colonizer have conformed their interests to

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<sup>850</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 47-48.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

that principle which has given “life and energy to all designs,” sharing a common vision of enlightened commerce and trade as being mutually beneficial. However, he warned that should this history lesson be ignored and the balance and mutuality of interest be unsettled, Britain’s imperial enterprise “will languish”:

So certain it is, that we often reap differently from what we have sown; and that there must be some strong active principle to give life and energy to all designs; or they will languish, let them be ever so wisely concerted.<sup>853</sup>

In America, then, England reaped differently from what it had sown—the implication for Burke’s reader was that the same may be true in the future if the Mother Country was not careful to ground the charting of its North American colonies in a magnanimity derived from experience and a proper understanding of human nature, as well as in a “liberal” understanding of commerce and trade, one of the most considerable “branches of political knowledge.” Burke argued that from the beginning of the settlement of the Americas, the connection between freedom and trade, by which he implied political economy more broadly, was integral. One, ultimately, was connected with the other. Ignorance of the principles underlying commerce and trade led to unwise “imports and duties charged on goods,” which in turn retarded “the progress of mankind.” This was a lesson to be avoided by Great Britain in America. Of course, it was not; and the consequences were to be disastrous. Burke’s early understanding of the centrality of these principles, both in theory and, more importantly for Burke, in the actual recorded history of mankind, and particularly in the annals of America, formed the backdrop of his earliest political engagement with America during the debates surrounding the repeal of the Stamp Act—a curtain not to be raised for another nine years.

Burke put this concern in the context of a first principle at the outset of his study of the European settlements in the New World: “Nations like France and England, full of people of spirit and industry, easily recover all the losses of war.... Wherever the vital principle subsists in full vigour, wounds are soon healed. Disorders themselves are a species of remedies; and every new loss not only shows how it may be repaired, but, by the vigour it inspires, makes new advantages known. Such losses renew the spirit of industry and enterprise; they reduce things to their first principles; they keep alive

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<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

motion, and make the appetites of traders sharp and keen. While the spirit of trade subsists, trade itself can never be destroyed. This is the reason that, amidst their continual wars, and the losses all the nations of Europe suffer from each other, they are almost all thriving.”<sup>854</sup>

It was an appreciation for this “spirit of industry and enterprise” that caused Burke to favor a prototypical free trade policy with and for the colonies, even in the midst of political conflict with France. “The French,” he wrote, “in permitting us to supply them, it is true, give us proof that they have advantages from this trade; but this is no proof at all that we derive none from it; for on that supposition, no trade could be mutually beneficial.” From this principle he also warned of the deficient effect trade regulations had on the imperial economy, especially when aimed at curbing outlawed commercial activity such as smuggling, “[W]e may know by experience, especially in that part of the world, how insufficient all regulations are to prevent a contraband, which would be so gainful to particulars.”<sup>855</sup> Such concerns foreshadowed arguments central to his American speeches of the 1770s, including his *Speech on American Taxation* in which he chastised the Grenville party for thinking “better of the wisdom and power of human legislation than in truth it deserves...too many are apt to believe regulation to be commerce, and taxes to be revenue.”<sup>856</sup> And they were echoed in Burke’s *Speech on Economical Reform* of 1780 when he observed that, “Commerce...flourishes most when it is left to itself. Interest, the great guide of commerce, is not a blind one. It is very well able to find its own way; and its necessities are its best laws.”<sup>857</sup>

### III.

On many occasions, Burke’s Irish experiences and interests came through the pages of the *Settlements*. It was evident above in the ways in which he incorporated his

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<sup>854</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 16-17.

<sup>855</sup> *Ibid*, II, pp. 180-181.

<sup>856</sup> Burke, *Speech on American Taxation*, WS, II, p. 432.

<sup>857</sup> Burke, *Speech on Economical Reform* (1780), WS, III, p. 535. Significantly, this observation forms the basis of Burke’s claim that the “board of trade and plantations has not been of any use to the colonies, as colonies; so little of use, that the flourishing settlements of New England, of Virginia, and of Maryland...were of a date prior to the first board of Charles the second. Pennsylvania and Carolina were settled during its dark quarter, in the interval between the extinction of the first, and the formation of the second board.... Georgia, which, till lately, has made a very slow progress; and never did make any progress at all, until it had wholly got rid of all the regulations which the board of trade had moulded into its original constitution.” See *Ibid*, p. 537. The extensive knowledge of colonial economic history Burke developed in writing the *Settlements* may well have informed this section of the *Speech*.

understanding of the Irish Penal Code into the analysis of the North American middle colonies. And it was at the surface of his sympathetic portrayal of Amerindian manners. Consider the following with regards to a sublimated Irish voice: “Here it is that their [Amerindians] orators are employed, and display those talents which distinguish them for eloquence and knowledge of public business; in both of which some of them are admirable.... The chief skill of these orators consists in giving an artful turn to the affairs, and in expressing their thoughts in a bold figurative manner, much stronger than we could bear in this part of the world, and with gestures equally violent, but often extremely natural and expressive.... Before the entertainment is ready, the principal person begins a song, the subject of which is the fabulous or real history of their nation, the remarkable events which have happened, and whatever matters may make for their honor or instruction. The others sing in their turn. They have dances too, with which they accompany their songs, chiefly of a martial kind; and no solemnity or public business is carried on without such songs and dances.”<sup>858</sup>

Burke may have been thinking here about the Bardic culture of medieval, feudal, and Catholic Ireland, a period and people also considered “savage” and “barbaric” by English conquerors. We are certainly reminded of Burke’s criticism of Robertson’s *History of America* on the grounds that it did not give proper due to “the eloquence or poetry of the Americans.” Furthermore, the similarities of the Indians’ mythological constructions would have recalled the ancient Irish to Burke’s mind, “and, as most of them have a notion of some invisible beings, who continually intermeddle in their affairs, they discourse much of demons, nymphs, fairies, and beings equivalent.”<sup>859</sup> Burke’s familial connection to and appreciation for this history was one source for his empathetic treatment of the original Americans.

As stated throughout this thesis, when Burke wrote about the New World, he had Ireland and its relation to England in mind. Soon after publishing the *Settlements* in 1757, Burke contracted with his publisher Dodsley to write *An Abridgement of English History*. The latter work commenced with Caesar’s invasion of Britain and was completed through the reign of King John and Magna Carta. It was shelved for an unknown reason and never published in his lifetime. In the various editions of Burke’s collected works, the

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<sup>858</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 178-179.

<sup>859</sup> *Settlements*, I, p. 173.

*Abridgement* is accompanied by the “Fragments on the Laws of England,” 1757, written during or conceived as part of the *Abridgements*. It has been speculated that it may have originally served as a draft introduction to the *Abridgements*.<sup>860</sup> Both are instructive for a better understanding of Burke’s historical craft and its relation to his later politics. Too, as an extension of the discussion in this chapter, in the pages of the *Abridgement* he argued that England deliberately and by force “conquered” Ireland. His conclusions provide a glimpse of how Ireland served as a precedent for Burke’s image of America—and just as significant, how the study of America prepared and sharpen Burke’s own mind when it came to writing about his understanding of Ireland.

In the pages of the *Abridgement*, Burke’s treatment of the conquest of Ireland was enveloped in the larger context of the repeated European conquests of England by the Romans, Britons, Saxons, and Normans. Against the grain of many Whigs in his day, Burke challenged the idea that there was in any recognizable modern form an “ancient constitution” that was inherited from the Saxons.<sup>861</sup> In distinguishing between the Tories and Whigs of his time, Burke argued that they each represent an extreme view of the ancient constitution:

The spirit of party, which has misled us in so many other particulars, has tended greatly to perplex us in this matter. For as the advocates for prerogatives would, by a very absurd consequence drawn from the Norman Conquest, have made all our national rights and liberties to have arisen from the grants, and therefore to be revocable at the will, of the sovereign; so on the other hand, those, who maintained the cause of liberty, did not support it upon more solid principles. They would hear of no beginning to any of our Privileges, Orders or Laws; and, in order to gain them a reverence, would prove that they were as old as the nation; and to support that opinion, they put to the torture all the ancient monuments.<sup>862</sup>

To correct these opinions, Burke argued that, “it is obvious, on the very first view of the Saxon Laws, that we have entirely altered the whole frame of our jurisprudence since the Conquest.”<sup>863</sup> Burke exhibited less “reverence” for a mythical foundation of the British constitution and sought to ground his history of the development of English liberty and

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<sup>860</sup> See editors’ introduction, *WS*, I, p. 321. Until the modern edition of Burke writings and speeches edited by Paul Langford, the “Fragment” was always appended at the end of the *Abridgement*. In the latest edition it precedes the *Abridgement*.

<sup>861</sup> “Fragment,” pp. 324–325. See also, J.G.A. Pocock, “Burke and the Ancient Constitution,” in *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1972), pp. 202–232.

<sup>862</sup> “Fragment,” *WS*, I, p. 324.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*



constitutionalism on more critical, more historically accurate, and ultimately, as he put it, “more solid principles.” To this end Burke concluded that the Saxon attempt at fashioning a civil social order in England “delineated the faint and incorrect outlines of our Constitution, which has since been so nobly fashioned and so highly finished.”<sup>864</sup> He argued that it was impossible, “visionary,” to “settle the ancient Constitution in the most remote times exactly in the same form, in which we enjoy it at this day; not considering that such mighty changes in manners, during so many ages, always must produce a considerable change in laws, and in the forms as well as the powers of all governments.”<sup>865</sup> He did not hold the view that the true lineaments of the later perfected British constitution were directly traceable to the Saxons: “In reality, that ancient Constitution, and those Saxon Laws, make little or nothing for any of our modern parties.”<sup>866</sup> “The Law of the Romans,” Burke noted, “seemed utterly to have expired in this Island together with their Empire...before the Saxon establishment.” And so, Burke held, the Saxons “came into England as conquerors. They brought their customs with them; and doubtless they did not take Laws from, but imposed theirs, upon the people they had vanquished. These customs of the conquering nation were without question the same, for the greater part, they had observed before their migration from Germany.”<sup>867</sup> What characterized the conquering Saxons? Burke contended that they were “a people without learning, without arts, without industry, solely pleased and occupied with war.... Such a people must necessarily be united to each other by very feeble bonds; their ideas of government will necessarily be imperfect; their freedom and their love of freedom great.”<sup>868</sup> From this Burke made the observation that “customs operate among them better than laws, because they become sort of nature both to the governors and the governed....” But for the Saxons, this effort was “a very imperfect attempt at government, a system for

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<sup>864</sup> *Abridgement*, p. 429.

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443.

<sup>866</sup> “Fragment,” *WS*, I, p. 325. Burke was applying his critical historical method here in dismissing authors such as Nathaniel Bacon (1593-1660) whose tendentious *Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England, from the First Times to the End of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth: With a Vindication of the Ancient Way of Parliaments in England* (1647-1651), did a kind of “violence” to the historical record: “N. Bacon, in order to establish his republican system, has so distorted all the evidence he has produced; concealed so many things of consequence, and thrown such false colours upon the whole argument; that I know no book so likely to mislead the Reader in our Antiquities....” *Ibid.*

<sup>867</sup> “Fragment on the Laws of England,” *WS*, I, p. 326. Compare with the *Abridgement*, pp. 434-444.

Tacitus was a chief source for Burke in this regard.

<sup>868</sup> *Abridgement*, *WS*, I, p. 429

a rude and barbarous people....”<sup>869</sup> It was their conversion to Christianity by the King of Kent, Ethelbert (d. 616), that brought about a “revolution” or “essential changes in their manners and government” that made the development of English constitutionalism and liberty possible.<sup>870</sup>

Throughout his historical projects Burke demonstrated that manners, more than laws, can change quickly in accord with developing circumstances. Differing from some members of the Scottish Enlightenment, he believed that manners preceded even commerce, and not the other way around; that the progress of commerce is dependent upon the health of a society’s manners and the institutions that nourish and protect them (such as the church, family, and elements of civil society).<sup>871</sup> Their fragile nature and direct connection to the morals of a people meant for Burke that great care, discernment, and prudence should be taken to protect the “quality” of a society’s manners. If healthy and intact, manners “aid” and “supply” morals; if they are cutoff from the historically natural sources of their vitality, subverted to remake society on idealized grounds (as Burke would come to believe was the fundamental danger of the Jacobins and the French Revolution), manners can “totally destroy” morality and sunder the social fabric. The enlightened reformer, then, must draw upon humanistic sources and be attentive to both the written and unwritten springs of cherished institutions. Freedom, to take one repeating historical interest or theme in Burke’s writings, was an English *inheritance*. It was traceable in its historical monuments, in the customs and mores of everyday people, and enshrined in the British constitution. Understood as such and taken together, it was in this way that the delicate tension between order and freedom can be maintained, held in trust by one generation and secured for the generation rising. Burke’s enlightened reformism was defined in large part by this appreciation for the importance of pre-contractual associations. As one interpreter put it, such “associations are not primitive forms of living

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<sup>869</sup> *Ibid*, p. 430. On Saxon law in England Burke also noted, “The Anglo-Saxons trusted more to the strictness of their police, and to the simple manners of their people, for the preservation of peace and order, than to accuracy or exquisite digestion of their laws, or the severity of the punishments, which they inflicted.... The Saxon laws, imperfect and various as they were, served, in some tolerable degree, a people, who had by their constitution an eye on each other’s concerns, and decided almost all matter of any doubt amongst them by methods, which, however inadequate, were extremely simple.” *Ibid*, pp. 443, 444.

<sup>870</sup> “Fragments on the Laws of England,” *WS*, I, pp. 325-326.

<sup>871</sup> “If, as I suspect, modern letters owe more than they are always willing to own to antient manners, so do other interests which we value full much as they are worth. Even commerce, trade, and manufacture, the gods of oeconomical politicians, are themselves perhaps but creatures: are themselves but effects, which as first causes, we choose to worship.” *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *WS*, VIII, p. 130.

to be superseded by an enlightened, social man when the time comes. They are the schools of behavior and values without which man will never become properly enlightened, and in the absence of which more ‘advanced’ contractual agreements will flounder.”<sup>872</sup> In his historical writing, Burke always remained sensitive to the existence of pre-contractual associations.

Importantly, this was also the basis for Burke’s admiration of the native Amerindians, and the part of their manners and character that could be envied by eighteenth-century Europeans: “Governed as they are by manners, not by laws; example, education, and the constant practice of their ceremonies, give them the most tender affection for their country, and inspire them with a most religious regard for their constitution, and the customs of their ancestors. The want of laws, and of a universal strong coercive power, is not perceived in a narrow society, where every man has his eye upon his neighbor, and where the whole bent of every thing they do is to strengthen those natural ties by which society is principally cemented.”<sup>873</sup>

Burke believed that laws, manners, and institutions change as the cultures in which they reside change or evolve, as was certainly the case with the repeated conquests of Britain.<sup>874</sup> Britain’s “ancient constitution” was not to be found literally intact and linearly traceable, but can rather be found or recovered through the historical monuments—laws, mores, manners, customs, institutions—of the past as a repository of wisdom to be applied afresh and imaginatively to contemporary times. As Burke put it, “the truth is, the present system of our Laws, like our language and our learning, is a very mixed and heterogeneous mass; in some respects our own; in more borrowed from a policy of foreign nations; and compounded, altered, and variously modified, according to the various necessities, which the manners, the religion, and the commerce of the people, have at different times imposed.”<sup>875</sup> In this way, and importantly for Burke, the constitution resided historically in a living tradition and not a dead one.

It is suggestive that a generally positive element of the Saxon identity he highlights is their great “love of freedom.” However, for Burke this Saxon freedom was a very high-spirited and libertarian attachment. The “imperfect” government of this “rude

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<sup>872</sup> Ian Crowe, “Edmund Burke on Manners,” *Modern Age*, volume 39, number 4, Fall 1997, p. 390.

<sup>873</sup> *Settlements*, I, pp. 181-182.

<sup>874</sup> Again, this Burke drew upon Montesquieu and the *Spirit of the Laws* for this belief. See C. P. Courtney, *Montesquieu and Burke* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 46-57.

<sup>875</sup> “Fragment,” p. 325.

and barbarous people,” thus, was not conducive to establishing and securing civil liberties for all. For the thread that ties together Burke’s narrative of the successive waves of conquest in England is the parallel march of freedom carried forward in history by the increasingly amalgamated British people. However, Burke’s terminal point in the *Abridgement* was the Magna Carta; and thus his ideal of freedom was not Saxon and libertarian, but Norman and ordered. For in the *Abridgement* he also held that the Norman conquest of England was a beneficial one and civilizing of the Saxons. Burke’s “Gothicism,” therefore, would have to be qualified. And the qualification has consequences for his view of freedom and the history of its development in this regard with a view toward Britain’s American colonists—which in some interesting respects echoed his treatment of the Saxons. The analysis of historians such as Colin Kidd that colonial British American identity was fundamentally characterized by a “frustrated colonial Saxonism” illuminates an important aspect of the image Burke will fashion of the Americans—a people “descendent of Englishmen” whose “predominating feature” is “a love of freedom” that is “fierce” and in some cases “high and haughty.”<sup>876</sup>

In the pages devoted to Ireland in the *Abridgement*,<sup>877</sup> Burke commenced his historical account by considering the religious dimension of Ireland’s early colonization, suggesting that Henry’s motives were at first encouraged by Rome, and then soon politically re-characterized following his fractured relationship with Rome in the wake of Thomas Becket’s murder (1170)—both supposed motivations nicely corresponding with Pope Adrian’s (1154-1159) and Pope Alexander III’s (1159-1181) expressed concern for problems in Ireland associated with what they saw as an irregular and undisciplined

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<sup>876</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 251. In addition, for a more comprehensive consideration of the “varieties of Gothicism in the British Atlantic world” in Ireland during Burke’s time see Kidd’s chapter of that title, pp. 250-261; also suggestive for our purposes is the section that follows on colonial America’s “Saxonism,” pp. 261-279. Burke, *Speech on Conciliation with America*, WS, III, pp. 119-122.

<sup>877</sup> Some have held that Burke planned to write a history of Ireland. The comparative length of his treatment of the Irish conquest in the *Abridgement* could lend weight to that “hypothesis,” but no evidence survives of his actually having contracted or begun to write such an account. See John C. Weston, Jr., “Edmund Burke’s Irish History: A Hypothesis,” *PMLA*, (1962), pp. 397-403. However, as we have seen, Burke took an active and lifelong interest in encouraging the writing of his native island’s history. To that end he encouraged especially John Curry, Thomas Leland, Charles O’Conor, Thomas Campbell, Sylvester O’Halloran, and Charles Vallancey. In this regard see Walter D. Love, “Charles O’Conor of Belangare and Thomas Leland’s ‘Philosophical’ *History of Ireland*,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 13, (1962), pp. 1-25. Also see Love, “Edmund Burke and an Irish Historiographical Controversy,” *History and Theory*, 2 (1962-1963), pp. 180-198. Finally, Burke interceded to secure a collection of extremely rare Irish manuscripts held by Sir John Sebright (1725-1794) and saw to it that they went to Trinity College. They now form the basis of Trinity’s Irish history collection. See Love, “Edmund Burke, Charles Vallancey, and the Sebright manuscripts,” *Hermathena*, 95 (1961), pp. 21-35.

Gaelic Catholic church.<sup>878</sup> Henry II came to Ireland to “secure the conquest,” Burke would write. Henry II, “well knew, from the internal weakness and advantageous situation of this noble island, the easiness and importance of such a conquest.”<sup>879</sup>

He chronicled how Dermot, the King of Leinster, was forced to flee Ireland and, “not unapprised of Henry’s designs upon his country, threw himself at his feet, implored his protection, and promised to hold of him, as his feudatory, the sovereignty he should recover by his assistance.” As for Henry, Burke reported that, “nothing could be more agreeable to him than such an incident....” Dermot and Richard, Earl of Striaul (“commonly called Strongbow”), began the enterprise in Ireland and “with an incredible rapidity of success” reduced many of Ireland’s principal cities. Henry himself followed this success by arriving himself with a huge fleet at Cork to secure “the allegiance of the conquerors. The fame of so great a force arriving under a prince, dreaded by all of Europe, very soon disposed all the petty princes...to submit and do homage to Henry.... [A]nd they hoped better treatment from submitting to the ambition of a great king....” And in so doing, Burke wrote in summation, “the English were established in their particular conquests.... The English Lords built strong castles on their demesnes; they put themselves at the head of the tribes, whose chiefs they had slain; they assumed the Irish garb and manners; and thus partly by force, partly by policy, the first English families took a firm root in Ireland.... [And] the continual effects of the Irish, for more than four hundred years, proved insufficient to dislodge them.”<sup>880</sup> Here Burke ends his brief history of what he believed was a conquest of his country.<sup>881</sup>

Importantly, Burke also spent a good bit of the space he gave Ireland in the *Abridgement* on the pre-history of Henry II’s conquest, pledging “to lay open to the reader the state of that kingdom” before providing “a short narrative of the reduction of Ireland.”<sup>882</sup> His Irish Celts parallel his earlier treatment of the English Saxons (whom he believed the Norman invaders helped “civilize” and in the process draw England closer to Europe). In the *Settlements*, the Amerindians constituted a similar parallel. In both works,

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<sup>878</sup> Burke, *An Essay towards the Abridgement of the English History*, WS, I, pp. 504-509.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 513, 509.

<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 512-514.

<sup>881</sup> Burke to Sir Hercules Langrishe (1792): “For a much longer period than that which had sufficed to blend the Romans with the nation to which of all others they were the most adverse, the Protestants settled in Ireland, considered themselves in no other light than that of a sort of a colonial garrison, to keep the natives in subjection to the other state of Great Britain. The whole spirit of the revolution in Ireland, was that of not the mildest conqueror.” WS, IX, p. 615.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 509.



the young Burke carefully studied the costs and benefits for all parties of cultural encounters with other peoples and civilizations.

Burke's method of dealing with the sources to commence what he believed was a much-needed objective history of Ireland was suggested by his comment that "[early Irish] histories, seeming clear sighted in the obscure affairs of so blind an antiquity, instead of passing for treasures of ancient facts, are regarded by the judicious as modern fictions. In cases of this sort rational conjectures are more to be relied on than improbable relations."<sup>883</sup> This Burke was no Irish exceptionalist. He could and did employ criticism in his historical writing. In one case, he corrected earlier histories on the point of the origin of the Irish language. Burke argued that "The Irish language is not different from those of all other nations, as Temple and Rapin, from ignorance of it have asserted; on the contrary, many of its words bear a remarkable resemblance not only to those of the Welsh and Armorick, but also to Greek and Latin."<sup>884</sup> He was also critical of the "order of succession, called Tanistry...", which he believed "prevailed in Ireland some hundreds of years after the rest of Europe" and was "attended with very great and pernicious inconveniences..." and "introduced a greater mischief than it was intended to remedy."<sup>885</sup> However, while Burke was plainly operating within the main critical currents of the Enlightenment period, it is not his critical acumen that ultimately characterized his historical sense, but rather his humanistic perception of the human good is what principally distinguished it.

His powerfully integrated mind was evident in another example, one in which he charted the effects of the destruction of monasticism in Ireland in preparing that kingdom for its eventual conquest by the English. He commended the advent of the Christian religion in Ireland with the arrival in the fourth century of St. Patrick and monasticism for cultivating and preserving learning during an otherwise benighted time in Europe. "This mode of [contemplative] life," he pointed out, "and the situation in Ireland, removed from the horror of those devastations, which shook the rest of Europe, made it a refuge for learning, almost extinguished every where else. Science flourished in Ireland during the

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<sup>883</sup> *Ibid*, p. 510.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid*, p. 510. Burke is referring here to William Temple's *An Introduction to the History of England* (1720), and Paul de Rapin de Thoyras's *The History of England* (1726).

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 433, 511. As Burke wrote, "it was obviously an affair of difficulty to determine who should be called the worthiest of the blood..." *Ibid*, p. 511. Burke was also critical of Tanistry in his review of Fernando Warner's *The History of Ireland* in the 1763 *Annual Register*, p. 278.

seventh and eighth centuries.” However, he noted, “The same cause that destroyed it in other countries destroyed it there.... The Danes, then Pagans...destroyed the sciences along with the monasteries, in which they were cultivated.” After which, the Irish fell into “domestick distractions as soon as they were freed from their foreign enemies, sunk quickly into a state of ignorance, poverty and barbarism.” This state of affairs was one reason Henry’s conquest so easily succeeded, as well as why it was sanctioned by Rome, “The disorders in the church were equal to those in the civil economy, and furnished to the Pope a plausible pretext for giving Henry a commission to conquer the kingdom in order to reform it.”<sup>886</sup>

In this regard, Burke was critical of the state of some traditional Irish institutions in the years leading up to the conquest. Their decline, he believed, made possible the conquest. “Whilst the dignities of the state were disposed of by a sort of election,” he wrote, “the office of Judges, who were called Brehons, the trades of mechanicks, and even those arts, which we are apt to consider as depending principally on natural genius, such as poetry and musick, were confined in succession to certain races...these and many other Irish institutions, well enough calculated to preserve good arts and useful discipline, when these arts came to degenerate, were equally well calculated to prevent all improvement, and to perpetuate corruption, by infusing an invincible tenaciousness of ancient customs.”<sup>887</sup> Here is a Burke many are not used to hearing, criticizing as he does the enervating effects of a dead or decaying Irish traditionalism, the “invincible tenaciousness of ancient customs.” Rather, here is seen more clearly the Burke that is put forth throughout this thesis: the Enlightened Christian reformer. This is not a Burke that some later interpreters would see as an ideological traditionalist; but rather the Burke who would state that a paradoxical element in the structure of human existence is that change is the means of conservation and that, as such, the ideal statesman would combine a disposition to preserve with an ability to improve. Burke was willing here to criticize the policy of both the Irish and the English: the former for clinging stubbornly, even ignorantly, to outmoded institutions and thus dividing and weakening their corporate selves and hastening their own demise; and the latter for taking ruthless advantage of a weakened people and stunted nation and in the process setting in motion centuries of

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<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 512.

conflict that could have been avoided had a wiser policy of full integration and reconciliation been pursued.

It is important to recall that he wrote about Ireland, its history of conquest and Catholic suppression, *after* he wrote about the history of settlement in the Americas. Hence, while the emphasis has been on the ways in which Ireland was a precedent to Burke's America, it becomes clear in retrospect that his early study of the "uncovering" of America by Europeans sharpened Burke's analytical ability and intensity of feeling with regards to his own Irish experiences. He became clearer about the nature and implications of the legal, religious, economic, and political exclusion of Ireland's majority population through his study of the American conquest. By extension, Burke's early American studies honed his sympathetic aesthetics as it related to his later politics. It is here that Burke the great orator and parliamentarian came into focus for the first time. And it is from here that we can trace the emergence of the passionate sage who would extend what he learned through his Irish experiences and American studies to imperial policy in India and revolution in France.



## Conclusion

Burke's America was an historical construction based on an understanding of Europe and of the common desires and nature of persons across cultures and across space and time. His frequent proclamations of objectivity or protests of impartiality, and his rhetorical use of "historical/historically" to mean that, suggest his self-conscious striving to be part of the commonplace conversations of his age. But Burke's conventional disapprovals of careless source work, mendacity, or even passionate partisanship in the writing of history, which he certainly believed inappropriate for the historian, are of secondary importance. For as Burke contended, the craft of history had another obligation that transcended even accuracy, and was evident most strikingly in the context of Burke's American character sketches. Namely, he wrote about the past as a judge, and for the sake of forming the judgment (and thus prudence) of his readers. His aim was not to recreate the past in an "objective" manner, an effort that can so easily lead to reductionist interpretations or to meaningless chronicles, but to engage the facts creatively with reference to what he called in his *Reflections* the "moral imagination."<sup>888</sup> In the eighteenth-century there were generally two reasons for writing history: either to discover universal laws or to undermine a present regime. Burke, however, operated within a larger, humanistic tradition which took the past seriously as being relevant to the present. Like a grandfather teaching a grandson through his experiences, the past, for Burke, was potentially a kind of stored wisdom.

Burke, as indicated within these pages, imaginatively and with great skill, integrated a number of traditions into his own historical thought: Classical in his interest in heroic models; Christian in his view of Providence and of God acting in or through history; and Enlightenment in his use of critical sources, pretension to impartiality, and integration of political, economic, geographic, climate, material, and religious factors to show how they relate to the formation of personal and national character, as well as to show the complexity and interdependence of historical episodes. Such elements in Burke's mind amounted to a developmental yet anti-deterministic picture of history; in

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<sup>888</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, p. 128.



which nations and constitutions slowly and unevenly grow; or, alternatively, for a similar host of reasons, decline. And in more complex civilizations, he believed both could occur at the same time.

Ireland was the great example and inspiration for his historical sense and method. He saw America through his Irish experience, and his experience of being Irish. Both Ireland and America were part of the empire, but on its periphery; both faced certain abuses of empire. He was conditioned by a particular understanding of Irish history, and his historical imagination was haunted by the awareness that the world of his kin had been (or was being) erased or destroyed. To America he had no personal attachment but his concerns were still the same. What do you do when you lose your world?

Such an approach is at least one indication why Burke, so famous for his later speeches about the North American colonies, intellectually traveled there first by of Ireland and then by way of South and Central America. For Burke, the Americas were an intellectual substitute for Ireland as much as Ireland was a precedent for his image of the Americas. He was too careful a thinker to conflate them. The connective tissue throughout his writings on the New World and Ireland was history. It was his broad historical vision that gave Burke's thought greater overall continuity. It connected those apparently unconnected fibers of this thought. In Ireland, America, India, and France he sought to understand many of the same problems confronting the task of civilization, differently as they manifested themselves in the space of time and the particularity of circumstance and experience.

As put forth in this thesis, Burke made every effort to be dispassionate in his own historical projects. He would not, however, turn objectivity into an abstraction. He believed that the historian was required to combine a formed judgment with informed principles, without which all such writing and reasoning "would be a confused jumble of particular facts and details."<sup>889</sup> And he held other historians to this high standard in his reviews. Burke's effort in this regard was important for his larger project of looking at people in their own terms, for who they are or were. It was this effort to *understand* that was the foundation of his pursuit of knowledge and truth. Burke's willingness to question the universal efficacy of reason and to contemplate other sources of knowledge qualified his commitment to the philosophical outlook of the Enlightenment as the *philosophes* and

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<sup>889</sup> *Speech on Toleration* (1792), *Works*, p. 117.

the *encyclopedists* articulated it. Indeed, as he allowed space in this regard for Revelation and poetic intuition, his Enlightenment was qualified by his Christianity and his literary-oriented classical learning.

While some Enlightenment figures, and their modern successors, seemed unwilling to forgive the past for not being like them, this was just the opposite of Burke. Burke's sympathy toward the "other" was not based on the notion that they were better (i.e. noble savage), but rather that they were different than we are. They needed to be understood, then, in their own terms if we are to understand them at all. Burke recognized that while there is a common human ground across cultures, there is also great variety in the world. Cultures or civilizations are not limited to one pattern or system. His was an anti-ideological approach, and was characterized by concepts such as sympathy, impartiality, analogy, and imitation. Burke's studies taught him early on that there is no uniform system of government, that neither individuals nor nations are governed by abstractions. It is in apprehending and reconciling the various tensions in a collective historical existence that true civilizations are conserved and extended over time. Burke's historical study made indelible in his thought a belief that culture precedes politics, manners precede commerce, custom precedes law, unwritten constitutions precede written ones, and ideas precede policy.

Their differences notwithstanding, Burke is worth comparing to Hume in one important way: their shared sympathy for the past in its own terms. They both grasped the degree to which there is a difference between the past and the present. Burke, in particular, was aware of the problems associated with writing "contemporary history." He was aware that one's point of view in writing history was only in part a political point of view. Hume, for example, certainly did not personally favor monarchy, and yet he still was able to "shed a generous tear" at the demise of Charles I.<sup>890</sup> Both Burke and Hume understood that implicit in this kind of historical sympathy was the recognition that when one problem is solved, another set is created for both the present and the future. Killing a king may or may not be the right course of action at a given time, but either way, the act itself opens up possibilities, and it just may be much worse the second time around.

Burke never pretended that he was a dialectician or political philosopher, but intentionally retained the stance of a man of letters in the tradition of Cicero, More,

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<sup>890</sup> See, *History of England*, IV, pp. 537ff.

Erasmus, and Francis Bacon who drew from the same streams of thought which nourished him; indeed, Burke looked askance at those who derived politics from pure philosophy, reminding those who would listen that beyond discursive reason there were other modes of knowledge—and that it is in these we frequently find the antidotes to abstract systems. Burke understood what he was doing in his histories as being “scientific” in the sense of seeing history as a record of the actions and thoughts of real people, and the inductive investigation of the natural world the best way to understand reality itself. Though he had a solid formation in philosophy at Trinity, Dublin, he made no pretense to being a theorist of the modern kind. Rather, his learning was ordered and integrated into a capacious worldview that pointed through the rational to the mysterious, and drew on the inscapes of poetry, to express them in prose.

And so, too, it is in studying “Burke’s America” that contemporary students can locate insight and themes that have long been lost due to the dominance of his later writings, especially on the French Revolution. The young Burke writing on America does not necessarily contradict the substance of the mature Burke writing about events in France or India. Rather, one gets a deeper appreciation of the complexity of Burke’s view of the nature of man and society, which, in turn, makes it much more difficult to reduce his vision to suit more modern perspectives or parties.

The parallels between the Christian humanists of the Northern Renaissance and Burke’s Christian Enlightenment are important in this regard. Like Burke, the Christian humanists were reformers—though mostly failed reformers—rather than revolutionaries. They sought purposeful change that did purge the accidental evil at the expense of the inherent good. The Reformation marked their failure. The dichotomy between Burke and Rousseau, in this regard, had its parallel in an earlier dichotomy between Erasmus and Luther. Such a contrast warrants further scholarly investigation as it would contribute to a better understanding of the revolutionary course of modern history that reached one climax in France in 1789, and others later on.

In his study of history, aesthetics, theology, and culture, Burke’s mind was anti-doctrinaire, and in his politics, anti-ideological. This helps to explain how such intimate connections developed between the different aspects of his thought. More suggestively, however, it helps to explain how Burke could turn his mind to so many different enterprises with such stunning results. He was able to do so because his thought was all

of a piece—broad and flexible—and because he held to certain verities about human nature and the human condition. Not everything, for him, was in constant flux; and so he could avoid the imposition of a narrow doctrine or ideology on what he knew from his researches to be the vast and diverse experience of man. This mental attitude, too, along with his own background and experience as an Irish outsider, enabled him to regard the men, practices, customs, and institutions of other times and places in their own terms, without prejudging them—a rare quality of mind in any age.

Part of what Burke detected from his studies of both native Amerindian manners and European historical experience was that when communal affections weaken and social bonds loosen, when what custom preserved for the guidance of new generations was broken, and what was formerly clear and assured becomes up for grabs, then one can be sure that someone or some sect or some party will try to create and then impose new fixities and certainties. The narrowness, or worse, the hubris, of the rash innovator was something the philosophically and temperamentally expansive Burke could not tolerate in art, in thought, in religion, in morality, or in politics. So it was not the radical *philosophes* whose unqualified embrace of modernity and the future became the norm, but the Enlightened traditionalist Edmund Burke who displayed the greater nimbleness and flexibility of mind. And he did so precisely because he thought within the framework of tradition.

And so as we take leave of Burke's early writing on America, we can indulge a glance ahead and detect how his image of America as it took form in the 1740s and 1750s contributed to both the strengths and the weaknesses of Burke's analysis of America during the political crises of the 1760s and 1770s. Focusing briefly on the ways in which his reading of America in the 1750s hampered his later understanding of the new ideological trends in the colonies that were such a potent source for Patriot discontent, a significant question naturally comes to mind: why, given his virtually unparalleled knowledge among politicians, did Burke fail to notice in any significant or sustained way what was new or different in the religious and intellectual history of the colonies since the 1757 publication of the *Settlements*? His later writings on France, and in a different sense in India, demonstrate a great capacity to discern the ultimate trajectory or meaning of movements of ideas, particularly when they were translated into action or policy. But by general consensus of his later eighteenth-century contemporaries, as much as his

modern critics, he largely missed the revolutionary signals in America. For example, J.C.D. Clark points out that Burke and his English contemporaries largely ignored Thomas Paine's tract *Common Sense*, in which was set out the revolutionary consequences of Deism. However, just a little more than a decade later, Burke and others saw in Paine's the *Rights of Man* a harbinger of the apocalypse.<sup>891</sup>

Why or how, given Burke's vast reading on the whole sweep of American history to that time, did Burke fail to notice some of the same elements of the Revolution in America that was to fire his indignation with the Revolution in France? The primary explanation pointed to by the survey of his early American writing in this thesis is that Burke did not ignore or overlook the fundamental ideological elements driving the growing crisis in America. Rather, his image of America at the height of his political powers was still basically the one he fashioned in the *Settlements*. When Burke wrote about the colonists and the colonial temperament in the 1760s and beyond, he was applying categories of thinking that corresponded to early eighteenth-century colonial British America, as well as to the planter culture that Burke would have experienced as someone known to have helped Granville. The steady flow to London and Westminster of privileged country aristocrats from throughout the colonies would have given Burke a particular view of one part of colonial society, and obscured another. And so while his work on the *Settlements* resulted in an unparalleled, for a working parliamentarian, historical understanding of the nature of America, its inhabitants, its manners, its institutions, as well as its unique problems and its boundless possibilities, that same knowledge which gave him so much clarity about the larger issues also helped blind him to some of the elements that were novel with the Americans of the latter eighteenth century.

Gordon Wood argues that Burke's friend, Benjamin Franklin, lagged behind most colonial Americans in his understanding of and enthusiasm for colonial separation from Britain.<sup>892</sup> Accepting that perspective, Burke himself lagged a little behind even his reluctant revolutionary friend. Had he had more direct contact with Americans themselves and their writings, he might have seen more clearly some of the same trends

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<sup>891</sup> See Clark's *The Language of Liberty 1660-1832*, and his counter-factual essay: "Edmund Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution in America* (1777); or How Did the American Revolution Relate to the French," in *An Imaginative Whig*, Crowe, ed., pp. 71-92.

<sup>892</sup> Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 2004), pp. 105-152.



that worried him in the decades after the American war, such as the elements of deism that made up the revolutionary mind, the Cromwellianism of New England preaching, the frontier-spirit, and the disdain for traditions exhibited in the 1760s and beyond.<sup>893</sup> But he had not caught up with what was innovative in colonial thought and culture during and after the French and Indian War. Part of that was due to the state of the trans-Atlantic book trade at the time. Books and monographs and newspapers were moving east to west with increasing ease and efficiency. The colonial book trade was booming. However, the flow did not move west to east, back over the ocean to London, with anywhere near the same ease.<sup>894</sup> Burke in the 1760s and early 1770s simply did not have access to the kinds of primary materials he would have needed to fully understand what had changed in the Americas since he wrote his study of the European settlements in the New World.

And so while Burke studied the nature and consequences of Catholic missionary enterprises in the sixteenth century, Protestant movements of enthusiasm in the seventeenth century, and the legacy of the Penal Laws in the eighteenth century, by the mid-half of the eighteenth-century he seemed to have at some level succumbed to the Enlightenment belief that the tide was moving away from the crude avarice and dehumanizing zealotry of previous generations. Yet, as Burke would have himself predicted, lurking within the garden of civilization are weeds and predators intent on choking its flowers. Or to stick with the metaphors of his own age, darkness follows light as night follows day. During the period of American rebellion and revolution, Burke could convince himself that the issue at hand was merely one of taxation and effective management. But as the Revolution progressed, and the anti-Catholic uprisings in Scotland in the late 1770s were followed by the Gordon riots in England in the 1780s, Burke came face-to-face (literally as it turned out with regards to his confrontations with the Gordon mobs) with a new manifestation of a perennial human condition: intolerance, intemperance, ignorance, superstition, and a enthusiasm for system-making. Had he read, for instance, the radical sermons that routinely stoked the libertarian passions of

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<sup>893</sup> See Fred Anderson's *The Crucible of War*, pp. 158-160.

<sup>894</sup> For a helpful study on this topic see James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, SC, 2002).

Americans he might have detected some of the smoke that fired his indignation with regards to revolutionary events in France.<sup>895</sup>

One qualification to this analysis is warranted: For Burke, the stakes were never as high in the American Revolution as they would be with the French Revolution. The American Revolution at its worst represented a rupture in the British Empire. The French Revolution, more seriously, represented a threat to Christian European civilization itself (of which Britain and its increasingly far flung empire were but a part).

The substance of Burke's political preoccupations during the age of the American Revolution went over well in the colonies, as they were shared by many leaders in the colonies. Such concerns included the alleged infringement of legal or customary rights, the threats posed by executive power, and corruption in public life. And while venting them in speeches, pamphlets, and newspaper accounts certainly gave his political party some immediate gratification from frustrating ministerial policy, the cost was that Burke's party-driven focus obscured what might instead have led to a more complete insight into the fresh ideological elements in the American revolt. In this particular circumstance, Goldsmith may have been correct when he wrote that Burke gave up for Party what was meant for Mankind.<sup>896</sup>

Still, his sallies against the perceived oppressors of the colonies made Edmund Burke into a patriotic torch for those Americans who first discovered him. His very name became an emblem, an important touchstone, which was evident in the literature of the age; such as in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*, when the wife of the narrator-farmer James warns him of the worthlessness of too much writing, hoping others will not find out how her husband engages in such vain activity. "Wert thee," she warns, "to write as well as friend Edmund, whose speeches I often see in our papers, it would be the very self same thing: thee wouldst be equally accused of idleness, and vain notions not befitting thy condition."<sup>897</sup> The colonists came to admire the Burke of their own

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<sup>895</sup> A representative collection of such sermons is Ellis Sandoz's *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis, IN, 1991). On occasion, Burke would have found his rhetoric being used for the ends of Patriot pastors in their ideological sermons. For example, In a 1775 sermon, the Reverend Moses Mather, a minister and fellow of Yale College, counted Burke among the few "illustrious patriots" who spoke ardently and resolutely on behalf of American liberty "with such dignity of sentiment, energy and perspicuity of reason, such rectitude of intention, uncorruptness and candor of disposition, and with such force of elocution, as must have rendered them irresistible, only by the omnipotence of parliament." In Sandoz, p. 476.

<sup>896</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *Retaliation: A Poem* (1774).

<sup>897</sup> J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, p. 21.

making: Burke the champion of liberty and liberal imperialism; Burke as opponent to ministerial abuse and arbitrary authority; or Burke as the eloquent and judicious orator.<sup>898</sup> His utterances were treasured by colonists desirous for a little bit of Britain to hold on to during the years of rebellion and social transformation. Fundamentally, though, Burke's image of Revolutionary-era America and the Americans' discovery of Edmund Burke were, much like the earliest maps of America, incomplete and often inaccurate.

And so as H. T. Dickinson argues with particular clarity, Burke was "a friend of America"; his appreciation and sympathies were real, but only in a limited sense.<sup>899</sup> His historical sense and his Whig preoccupation with liberty brought him imaginatively close to the Americans, while at the same constrained his ability to translate the fruits of his learning into the practical political solution and theoretical meaning wanted by the Patriots in the mid-1770s. Burke wanted to avoid conflict, and to that end he urged conciliation. He vigorously opposed strong interference in the internal affairs of the colonies. These positions were largely informed by his historic understanding of the European experience in America. However, given the way the situation had developed, he could not go beyond the history that bound both the colonies and their Mother Country together and concede enough of what the Patriots wanted to resolve the crisis. He never went beyond the principles of the Declaratory Act that he helped fashion, "the system of 1766" as he later referred to it.<sup>900</sup> Burke could not envisage an empire of equal parts, and consistently saw Westminster as the ultimate authority in terms of sovereignty (e.g. in commercial and foreign policy matters, and in legal disputes). There was no practical solution to the American demand of "no taxation without representation" by representing the colonies effectively at Westminster. The only alternative for the patriots was to concede power to their own assemblies by taking it away from Westminster. The Patriots wanted complete control of all American affairs. Burke could not fully go along with this. In his later American speeches, he could not offer enough of what the Patriots wanted and yet was offering to surrender too much of what parliament wished to retain. He needed to be quite explicit about sovereignty if he was to offer a real solution to the crisis. Historically informed and high-sounding rhetoric would not be enough.

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<sup>898</sup> Based on a seminar talk at the University of Edinburgh by yours truly and entitled, "Edmund Burke and the Emergence of an American Image," November 5, 2003.

<sup>899</sup> See Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 205-220.

<sup>900</sup> *Speech on American Taxation*, WS, II, p. 462.

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This thesis is principally an extended consideration of Burke's image of America during a particular period of his life. In addition, part of its gaze is fixed on his future in order to detect the implications that the historical foundations which formed this image would have on his later political thought. In closing, then, it seems fitting to end with another, complementary image.

At the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC, stands a statue of Edmund Burke with his hand extended eastward. It is an exact replica of the statue of Burke by the Welsh sculptor James Havard Thomas (1854-1921) that stands in Bristol, the commercial city Burke once represented in Parliament. The monument is a silent witness on a principal thoroughfare in America's capital city to Burke's great writings on behalf of the colonies during their movement toward independence. But in the context of the preceding pages, these memorials also can be understood to represent something more.

Burke's right arm reaches out from Bristol to America, and in return from Washington to Europe. The Bristol statute might, thus, be thought to represent Burke the eighteenth-century European who proffered his hand to the New World in acknowledgement of a common bond; while the Burke in the modern American capital, left heel off the ground and right hand extended in the direction of Europe, might be considered to be a reminder of the impact America and the Americas had on his own thought and politics. In bringing such images together, they combine to form a single image of these bronze Burkes attempting to reach out and clasp the other's hand in order to bridge the Atlantic Ocean's divide and hold together a common civilization and all that it implies. Of course, the arms of the statues are deathlessly extended, pointing to but never reaching their intended destination. That is as Burke himself would have had it in life. The Commonwealth of the West will not be held together or reformed by mighty arms, as he argued on many occasions. Rather, it will be secured by vigilant attention to the sources of its manners, mores, and political traditions. And it will require prudent, far-sighted leaders, along with imaginative efforts to renew civil social affections in each generation—a crucial effort that brings every individual into the ceaseless struggle that Burke understood was required for the conservation of civilization.

## Appendix

### **The Place of Edmund Burke in the Concept of Atlantic History: A Historiographic Postscript**

Bernard Bailyn, generally considered to be the “father” of the Atlantic History school of historiography, has argued that the concept of Atlantic history proceeds from the belief that “By the mid-eighteenth century Britain’s involvement in the Atlantic world was...so extensive at its apogee in the 1760s, the range of its interests in the territories it governed so broad, that its proper study is in effect a deep probe into that entire inter-hemispheric civilization.”<sup>1</sup> Significantly, this is precisely the period during which Edmund Burke was writing and thinking about America, as historian, journalist, and, ultimately, party politician. It was a period of growth and consolidation for Britain’s First Empire through the Seven Years’ War, and then of the Empire’s subsequent rupture in the North Atlantic. This time of crisis, national dissolution and formation, and democratic revolution made an enormous impact on the historiography of the mid- to late-eighteenth century. As has been argued in this thesis, it decisively affected Burke’s historical mind and the ripples of its impact continue to shape historical thinking into our own time. Burke’s America, then, can helpfully be considered in the context of the present and past of the changing societies that he himself experienced first hand and reflected upon in his early writings and later political speeches.

#### I.

And in fact, Atlantic historians are today closer to making a connection with Burke than they perhaps have realized. In their own search for a tradition, central figures in the new Atlantic “school” have pushed their lineage back to historians and public intellectuals who were themselves deeply, even principally, inspired by Edmund Burke. In this effort, the work of Bailyn and David Armitage is most significant. Each has traced the origins of the school of Atlantic History to pre-Cold War Catholic historians “attracted” to the idea

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<sup>1</sup> Bailyn, “Preface,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. xiv.



of a post World War II Atlantic regional power center that might better protect the vestiges of “Western or Latin Christendom,” against aggressively secular and nationalist regimes. In particular, Bailyn believes that thinkers such as these, especially “sensitive...to the threat of Communist expansion,” were the originators of this Atlantic idea.<sup>2</sup>

As Bailyn observed, “These historians—first among them, significantly, Catholics—grasped the historical importance of the underlying assumptions and implications” of conceiving American history in a broader, transatlantic context.<sup>3</sup> Bailyn does not state why it is significant that Catholics “grasped” this concept first. But the implication is that Catholics did so because of the international dimension of their religion and their recent historical experience (relative to older settler traditions) as immigrant Americans allowed them to view America more fully as part of a broader civilization. Armitage contends that post-war “historians, many of them Catholic converts...proposed the idea that there had existed, at least since the Enlightenment, a common ‘civilization’ in the North Atlantic world that linked North American societies (especially, of course, the United States) with Europe by means of a common set of pluralist, democratic, liberal values...[which] had its own deeper genealogy in a common religious heritage.”<sup>4</sup> Bailyn, in particular, highlights the work of Fordham historian Ross J. S. Hoffman (1902-1979). He points to Hoffman’s 1945 essay entitled “Europe and the Atlantic Community” as the first appeal by a professional historian to fashion a new “idea of Atlantic history.”<sup>5</sup> In that essay, written as the curtain of the Second World War was drawing closed, Hoffman observed: “Our minds move in old grooves. We go on thinking in isolationist concepts, of Europe and America, of eastern and western hemispheres, of old world and new world; or we bridge these conceptual divisions in a universalism that takes little or no account of the realities which, after all, these concepts do designate in a rough and vague way. Thus many fail even to notice the existence of the mighty geographic, historical and political reality that surrounds us on all sides: The Atlantic

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<sup>2</sup> Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” p. 22. See also, Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 12.

Community.”<sup>6</sup> In this passage, Hoffman strikes the Burkean balance between the particular and the universal, between the “old grooves” that served artificially to separate Europe from America to the detriment of both and the new globalists who “take little or no account” of the realities of nations and regions particular to both sides of the Atlantic. Alternately, he constructed the image of a “bridge” that spans the “conceptual divisions” of particularity and provides passage to and among the diverse peoples that make up the “mighty, historical and political reality” that is the Atlantic community.

For Hoffman the states comprising the North and South American continents emerged from, and were an extension of, “Western European Christendom.” Burke’s “Commonwealth of Christian Europe” was the specific historical and political reality Hoffman had in mind. Earlier than other Atlanticists, Hoffman in an important 1942 work (one that Bailyn does not consider) characterized the Atlantic community as “the inner sea of Christendom.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout Hoffman’s writings the Americas are very much part of a geographic conception that Voltaire characterized in the eighteenth century as *le grande république d’Europe* and Hoffman re-characterized in the twentieth century as “the great republic.”<sup>8</sup> In this view, “Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutchmen and Danes in the early modern centuries made the Atlantic Ocean the inland sea of Western Civilization; they made it an historical and geographic extension of the Mediterranean round the shores of which our civilization began.”<sup>9</sup> Post-war American strategy, according to Hoffman, ought thus, to be aimed at “fortifying the Atlantic citadel.... Our historical roots, our natural allies, our political civilization and our material fortunes are staked immovably in this citadel.... This is the international community that expressed its deepest instincts and unwittingly described its own nature in the Atlantic Charter.”<sup>10</sup> For Hoffman, the power and potential of the idea of Atlantic history resided in the recognition that as a “community” the Atlantic nations were the “progeny of Western Christendom.”<sup>11</sup> And in the current state of historical development, the children had matured and were now called upon to tend to an aging parent. Indeed, as

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<sup>6</sup> Ross J.S. Hoffman, “Europe and the Atlantic Community,” *Thought*, Volume 20 Number 76, March 1945, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Hoffman, *The Great Republic*, p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Ross J. S. Hoffman, *The Great Republic* (New York, 1942).

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, “The Atlantic Community,” p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Hoffman, “The Atlantic Community,” p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, “The Atlantic Community,” p. 34.

we shall see, Hoffman and others who followed him believed it was the peculiar fate of the nations composing the North Atlantic triangle to carry the burden of reinvigorating the body of Christendom in the twentieth century—and in so doing secure the current and future interests of free nations throughout Western world.

However, what Bailyn, Armitage, and others have not detected is that a heretofore key but unacknowledged source of the new school of Atlantic history is Edmund Burke. Hoffman's conception of Atlantic History was informed by Burke's understanding of history and his imperial theory that linked Europe to the Americas. Indeed, Hoffman located in Burke an eighteenth-century model for thinking historically about the Atlantic political world. And Burke's politics helped to give shape and substance to Hoffman's own version of Atlantic history. In a memoir of his academic career at Fordham, Hoffman alluded to this point, describing his own project in the 1930s and 1940s as a "protracted effort...to use historical knowledge to advance...right principles of politics; not Catholic principles—for there are no Catholic political principles—but principles consistent with the preservation and prospering of Christian values and ultimate ends. They had been well set forth by Leo XIII in his encyclical on *Christian Democracy*.<sup>12</sup> They were essentially Burke's principles of politics...."<sup>13</sup> Hoffman had begun as a socialist, but after World War I converted to Catholicism and began to supplement his professional writing on contemporary European and American history with intellectual forays into the Middle Ages and, ultimately, eighteenth-century British history.<sup>14</sup> Burke, in particular, unlocked for Hoffman a usable past that connected morality and politics, Europe and America.

What did Burke mean by Europe and European civilization? In the mid-1790s, near the end of his life, he projected in a series of letters on the "Regicide Peace" in France a striking image of Europe as "virtually one great state" comprised of a "diversity of provincial customs and local establishments."<sup>15</sup> This image was the summation of his thinking on this question that began in Ireland during his Dublin school years in the

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<sup>12</sup> *Graves De Communi Re* ("On Christian Democracy") was promulgated by Pope Leo XIII on January 18, 1901.

<sup>13</sup> Ross J.S. Hoffman, *Fordham Memoir*, a series of letters in the form of a memoir written to Gaetano L. Vincitorio of St. John's University at his request, August 25, 1973 [copy in the possession of this author thanks to, and with the kind permission to quote from, Professor Vincitorio].

<sup>14</sup> See his autobiography, *Restoration* (New York, 1934).

<sup>15</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, *WS*, IX, pp. 248.

1740s and continued in London during the 1750s as a law student and aspiring historical journalist. In his early writings as in his later speeches, the collection of independent states that comprised “Europe” was broad and inclusive of the North Atlantic on one frontier and Russia on the other. This in part is evidenced, importantly, by the fact that Burke included the contemporary affairs of America and the West Indies in his famous “History of Europe” essay that introduced each new volume of *The Annual Register*.

The “system of Europe” or the “European System,”<sup>16</sup> as Burke called it, was united by a common Christian culture, “the similitude...of religion, laws, and manners.”<sup>17</sup> Burke views the aggregate of nations in Europe as one “Commonwealth,” in that it is “virtually one great state” with a shared source for its structures of government, economy, and education. Namely, “the old Germanic or Gothic customary [law]; for the feudal institutions which must be considered an emanation from that customary...and digested into system and disciplined by the Roman law.”<sup>18</sup> This is the basis for his conception of the “Commonwealth of Europe,”<sup>19</sup> or what he variously calls the “community of Europe”<sup>20</sup> and, more suggestively, the “Commonwealth of Christian Europe” or the “great Christian Commonwealth.”<sup>21</sup> From these roots spring modern political institutions: the “several orders, with or without a Monarch, which are called States in every European country.”<sup>22</sup> And while the economic and political ties that bound Europe together in a community of interest is central to Burke’s notion of Europe, and in a larger context, his theory of empire, an even more foundational glue is, he argued in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the “antient system of opinion and sentiment” he conceptualizes as “manners.”<sup>23</sup> He held that from older notions of chivalry that flourished in the feudal Middle Ages, a code or tradition of manners developed which “softened, blended, and

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<sup>16</sup> Burke, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, WS, II, p. See also, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, WS, IX, p. 281; and *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 357.

<sup>17</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, WS, IX, pp. 248.

<sup>18</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, pp. 248-249.

<sup>19</sup> Several uses of this phrase appear in *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, most significantly in *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 357; but also in *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, pp. 266.

<sup>20</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 249.

<sup>21</sup> *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, pp. 50, 60.

<sup>22</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 248. Interestingly, as this was written in the mid-1790s when Burke writes the following lines—“In the few places where Monarchy was cast off, the spirit of the European Monarchy was still left”—he may well partly have had in mind America and its new institution of the Presidency. See, too, in this regard *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 78, where Burke discusses America’s new executive George Washington, that “Great Chief.”

<sup>23</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, p. 137.

harmonized the colours of the whole.” For Burke, a student of both history and law, manners “are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us.” “The law,” on the other hand, merely “touches us but here and there, and now and then.”<sup>24</sup> While he cherished particularity and regional difference, he nevertheless held that at “bottom, these [European states] are all the same.” And it was Burke’s lifelong philosophical effort to work out the implications of the concept of “sympathy” that brought him to the consciousness that it was familiarity and shared roots that linked the peoples of Europe more than any “instrumental” framework or mechanism. As he expressed it,

Men are not tied to one another by papers and seals. They are led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies. It is with nations as with individuals. Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nation and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners, and habits of life. They have more than the force of treaties in themselves. They are obligations written in the heart.... The secret, unseen, but irrefragable bond of habitual intercourse, holds them together, even when their perverse and litigious nature sets them to equivocate, scuffle, and fight about the terms of their written obligations.<sup>25</sup>

Significantly for Burke, that way of life, that “correspondence in laws, customs, [and] manners,” those “habits of life” and “obligations written in the heart” extended to European settlements in the Americas—especially, for English-speaking Britain, to colonial North America. As he put it, “I do not know why I should not include America among the European Powers; because she is of European origin.... As long as that Europe shall have any possessions either in the southern or the northern parts of that America, even separated as it is by the ocean, it must be considered as a part of the European system.”<sup>26</sup> From his earliest days in Parliament, Burke understood that such

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<sup>24</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 242.

<sup>25</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 247. This important element in Burke’s thought is stated more famously in the *Reflections* when he laments that “the glory of Europe is extinguished” with the revolutionary attack on “the spirit of our old manners and opinions”: “Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the results of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.” *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, WS, VIII, pp. 127, 129-130.

<sup>26</sup> *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 325. Edward Payne’s footnote to this line in his famous nineteenth century edition of Burke’s works is both historically correct and indicative of how modern Burke scholars interpret the ongoing significance of Burke’s American writings: “Though the possessory interest of Europe in America has practically ceased, time has confirmed Burke’s diplomatic dictum that “America is to be considered part of the European system.” *Select Works*, III, p.231.



obligations were mutual, they flowed both ways: a fact that was unacknowledged or refused by the majority of British bureaucrats and legislators during the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s. Burke always believed this was the root cause of the imperial disaster that was the American Revolution. Burke punctuated his comprehensive and even cosmopolitan image of Europe with the statement, “no citizen of Europe can be altogether an exile in any part of it.”<sup>27</sup> It is, in his theory, “the grand vicinage.”<sup>28</sup> “With these words of Burke,” noted Denys Hay, “we come to the final realization of the idea of Europe.”<sup>29</sup> For more than a mere geographical or territorial construction, Europe had become an “idea,” and the adjective “European”—for Burke—a cultural more than a political development from that idea by the close of the eighteenth century. Thus Burke was one of Europe’s great early defenders and spokesmen, seeing it as both encompassing and representing a distinct way of life.

## II.

Daniel J. Boorstin (1914-2004) has examined just how central the American image of Europe has been to the American image of America. For Boorstin, the American image of “Europe” has traditionally been a foil for the self-image of Americans.<sup>30</sup> From the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century, he argued, American thought is characterized by a vision of the polarity of Europe and America. The theme of America as a historically unique and exceptional creation is evident in much colonial and early national American writing. As Jack P. Greene has noted in this regard, “the concept of American exceptionalism with its positive connotations was present at the very creation of America....”<sup>31</sup> One hears this chord highly pitched in a letter of Jefferson’s to Priestly at the turn of the eighteenth century: “We can no longer say there is nothing new under the sun. For this whole chapter in the history of man is new.... Before the establishment of

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<sup>27</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 249.

<sup>28</sup> *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, p. 251.

<sup>29</sup> Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea*, p. 123.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *America and the Image of Europe: Reflections on American Thought* (New York, 1960). What follows in this paragraph is my appropriation and re-formulation of Boorstin’s thesis for the purposes of setting the background of Burke’s appropriation by the earliest Atlantic historians. I have borrowed in places his terminology and have put those terms in quotations. For an obviously fuller and detailed treatment of this complex topic see especially pages 19-39, 121-138.

<sup>31</sup> Jack P. Greene, *The Intellectual Construction of America* (Chapel Hill, 1993), p. 6.

the American States, nothing was known to history but the man of the old world, crowded within limits either small or overcharged, and steeped in the vices which that situation generates.”<sup>32</sup> It is also to be found in Crèvecoeur.<sup>33</sup> The exceptionalist or “singularist” view of America was reinforced by distorted images depicting Europe as a center of misery, disease, oppression, poverty, decadence—each believed to be fostered, structured even, by corrupt Aristocratic orders. This image of Europe runs deep in the American psyche and has been persistently, even tenaciously, held throughout American history.<sup>34</sup>

However, the polar view cultivated by American singularists—such as Emerson, Bancroft, or Turner—began to weaken or breakdown in the twentieth century at the outset of World War I when many Americans began to perceive that they in fact shared a similar predicament as Europeans. The distorted image of Europe thus began to take a more realistic shape. At this point, a reversal slowly begins to occur as the general American image of Europe moves from one of antithesis to one of congruence. Discontent with democratic, materialist, and naturalistic trends in American thought turned an increasing number of American thinkers toward Europe in the belief it could culturally replenish what America was lacking. America, it was thought, would be better served by assimilating itself into the larger cultural “universal” that she once shared, lost, but now must regain out of necessity of having become a central world power.

The American image of Burke during its “singularist” or “universalist” phases of understanding Europe usually reduced Burke to an eloquent statesman and writer whose value was that he reinforced an essential aspect of these respective images. The high tide of what Naomi Townsend has called the “idealistic and eulogistic” American image of Burke was 1897, the centenary of his death, when assessment of Burke were appearing in

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<sup>32</sup> March 21, 1801. Quoted in Boorstin, *America and the Image of Europe*, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> “The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions.” J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Oxford, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> If at the end of the eighteenth century “Europe” was to become itself a universal idea, the name of a continent having grown to include a way of life, as Denys Hay concluded, one hundred years later that idea had migrated west and been replaced by America—a country within a continent now firmly associated with a universal human “dream” of material and spiritual possibility and about to embark on its own century, “the American Century.” On the “American Dream” see James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New York, 1932) and James Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford, 2003). On the “American Century,” see Henry R. Luce, *The American Century* (New York, 1941) and Donald W. White, *The American Century: The Rise and Decline of the United States as a World Power* (New Haven, 1996).

major American magazines and journals.<sup>35</sup> Singularists tapped into this image of Burke as principally a champion of American liberty, a prominent statesman and contemporary of America's founders who chose the New World's cause over the Old. The great late-nineteenth century example of this kind was Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), who was a devoted Burke disciple in his early years and considered him "the authentic voice of the best political thought," the greatest "Interpreter of English Liberty." Wilson's image of Burke was an American version of John Morley's (1838-1923): that of an expedient political thinker whose English and liberal ideals were usually chastened and directed by practicality but were also in substance consistent in the application of principles to varying political circumstances.<sup>36</sup> His American speeches, for Wilson as for Morley, best represented the core of a principled liberalism that was reducible, in Wilson's writing, to an English variety of Americanism.<sup>37</sup> As U.S. president, Wilson would take the American

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<sup>35</sup> Townsend, *Edmund Burke*, p. 78. Examples of Burke appreciation on the centennial of his death can be found in Kate H. Claghorn, "Burke: A Centenary Perspective," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXX (July 1897), pp. 84-95; J. O'Connor Power, "Edmund Burke and His Abiding Influence," *North American Review*, CLXV (December 1897), 666-681; and "Burke on Party," *Nation*, (December 30, 1897), pp. 512-513.

<sup>36</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "The Interpreter of English Liberty," in *Mere Literature and Other Essays* (Boston, 1896), pp. 104-60. Also included in volume three, *Selected Literary and Political Papers and Addresses of Woodrow Wilson*, three volumes (New York, 1925). Also see, Peter J. Henriot, "Woodrow Wilson: A Disciple of Edmund Burke?", *Studies in Burke and His Times*, volume 10, 1969, pp. 1201-08.

<sup>37</sup> Morley: "If ever, in the fullness of time—and surely the fates of men and literature cannot have it otherwise—Burke becomes one of the half-dozen names of established and universal currency in education and in common books, rising above the waywardness of literary caprice or intellectual fashions, as Shakespeare and Milton and Bacon rise above it, it will be the mastery, the elevation, the wisdom, of these far-reaching [American] discourses in which the world will in especial degree recognize the combination of sovereign gifts with beneficent uses." John Morley, *Burke* (London, 1888), p. 117.

Wilson: Edmund Burke's "words, now that they have cast off their brogue, ring out the authentic voice of the best political thought of the English race. 'If any man ask me,' he cries, 'what a free government is, I answer, that, for any practical purpose, it is what the people think so, —and that they, and not I, are the natural, lawful, and competent judges on the matter.' 'Abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found. Liberty adheres in some sensible object; and very nation has formed to itself some favorite point, which by way of eminence becomes the criterion of their happiness.' These sentences, taken from his writings on American affairs, might serve as a sort of motto of the practical spirit of our race in affairs of government. Look further, and you shall see how his imagination presently illuminates and suffuses his maxims of practical sagacity with a fine blaze of insight, a keen glow of feeling, in which you recognize that other masterful quality of the race, its intense and elevated conviction.... Does not your blood stir at these passages? And is it not because, besides loving what is nobly written, you feel that every word strikes towards the heart of the things that have made your blood what it has proved to be in the history of our race?... No other similar productions that I know of have this singular, and as it were inevitable quality of permanency. They have emerged from the mass of political writings put forth in their time with their freshness untouched, their significance unobscured, their splendid vigor unabated.... The man who could do this must needs arrest our attention and challenge our inquiry. We wish to account for him as we should wish to penetrate the secrets of the human spirit and know the springs of genius." Woodrow Wilson, "Interpreter of English Liberty," *Mere Literature* (New York, 1896), pp. 105-108.

singularist tradition in an aggressive and quasi-religious new direction by championing an exportable Anglo-American democratic universalism.

Of course, opposition to this American tendency, and the image of Burke held by universalists was rooted in a deeper awareness of a common American and European civilizational impulse. In the South, the Virginia historian Philip Alexander Bruce (1856-1933), in the tradition of earlier Southern Burkeans such as John Randolph of Roanoke (1773-1833) and John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), offered an antithesis to the dominant Fredrick Jackson Turner “frontier” approach that tapped into the deep American inclination to leave the past behind. As he put it with reference to colonial Virginia, the early settlements there “resembled more the long established communities of England than the communities of a new country as conceived of by us in the light of our knowledge of the modern American frontier.”<sup>38</sup> Bruce’s Southern exceptionalism was rooted in a larger British and European universalism that found in Burke an attractive spokesman for a philosophy of society based on inter-generational “partnership.”<sup>39</sup> In the North, two literary professors, Harvard’s Irving Babbitt (1865-1933) and Princeton’s Paul Elmer More (1864-1937) were also attracted to this Burkean idea of an Anglo-American generational contract. Together Babbitt and More fashioned a movement aiming to apply humanist standards of criticism to American cultural, intellectual, and political life. The so-called New Humanism was largely a reaction to uncritical American exceptionalism and what they contended were its many corrupting influences. They were opposed to what they believed was the leveling tendency of American democracy and mechanistic capitalism, the excesses of which were leading America, in their view, to mediocrity and dull uniformity. They looked to a European past and to European thinkers for diagnosis and prescription—their foremost political authority being Edmund Burke. Babbitt in particular was early twentieth-century America’s great advocate. He found in Burke a model pre-Revolutionary American sympathizer who had formulated an aesthetic-based and deeply historical politics.<sup>40</sup> He was a critique of Rousseau and the undisciplined

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<sup>38</sup> Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century: An Inquiry into the Religious, Moral, Education, Legal, Military, and Political Condition of the People, Based Upon Original and Contemporaneous Records*, two volumes (New York, 1910), I, p. 106.

<sup>39</sup> For a lengthier discussion see Michael D. Clark, *The American Discovery of Tradition, 1865-1942* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2005), pp. 66-115.

<sup>40</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston, 1924; Indianapolis, Indiana, 1979), p. 122.

romantic spirit that had taken hold in modern American culture since that time. In opposition to Rousseau and the “idyllic imagination,” he offered Burke and the “moral imagination” as a better guide than naturalism.<sup>41</sup> Babbitt’s Burke “admits the supreme role of the imagination” more than other figures in the classical or Christian canon. “He saw,” noted Babbitt, “how much of the wisdom of life consists in an imaginative assumption of the experience of the past in such a fashion as to bring it to bear as a living force upon the present.”<sup>42</sup> Man’s private stock of wisdom, he and More held, is insufficient. We must rely rather on the past, on “the wisdom of our ancestors,” and so turn to the great Western European tradition from which America was born and increasingly is called upon to guard. Burke, he advanced, had “attained to that profound perception of true liberty in which he surpasses perhaps any other political thinker, ancient or modern. For one who believes in personal liberty in Burke’s sense, the final emphasis is necessarily not on the state but on the individual. His individualism, however, is not, like that of Rousseau, naturalistic, but humanistic and religious.”<sup>43</sup> Paul Elmer More shared Babbitt’s disciplined humanism and call for a return to more classical standards in criticism and politics. He located in Burke the great theorist of “natural aristocracy,” and to that end found Burke’s American speeches at Bristol, in which he dared “the displeasure of the people,” an important source.<sup>44</sup> For both, authentic American individualism need be less rugged and more humane; resisting, that is, democratic tendencies which reduce people to the lowest common denominator and instead foster a “new humanism” that will foster in civil society “natural aristocrats” capable of imaginatively joining past and present, tradition with the inevitable and necessary demands of change. They extended their criticisms to Dewey and modern education, humanitarianism, and scientism all along seeking better contemporary resources for America on the other side of the Atlantic. Babbitt and More’s “new humanism” was an inter-war predecessor to the even more influential “new conservatism” that emerged after World War II. Indeed, most of the great figures of that

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<sup>41</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, see chapter two, “Rousseau and the Idyllic Imagination,” and chapter three, “Burke and the Moral Imagination.”

<sup>42</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>43</sup> Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Elmer More, “Natural Aristocracy,” *Shelburne Essays*, IX (New York, 1915), p. 9.



movement acknowledged their debt to Babbitt and More, and through them to Burke.<sup>45</sup> For our purposes, according to Boorstin, through the efforts of such thinkers, and by “a kind of historical legerdemain, the roles of America and Europe were reversed.”<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the Great War and the onset of the Great Depression the “singularist” and “universalist” tension settled into recognizable positions. At the level of national politics, Herbert Hoover and his followers were representative singularists, blaming as they did Europe for the Depression and resisting any American turn to Europe, instead championing a reinvigoration of older traditions of American self-reliance and rugged individualism. Whereas Franklin Roosevelt and his circle were more akin to the universalists, perceiving as they did systemic weaknesses in key areas of American life and locating in Europe models for the New Deal and, hence, sources for American recovery. One response was to turn inward, away from Europe, the other to turn outward, across the Atlantic and toward Europe.<sup>47</sup>

However, a moderate corrective to the humanist and conservative correction to American exceptionalism and polarity also began to appear during and after World War II. The emerging moderate approach accepted both the unique and the universal aspects of America, its contributions and character. This “pluralist” image of America and Europe was principally historical, taking the longer view of American and European history as a movement or continuum and not attempting to freeze in any one point as containing the universal explanation for all that came before and has since gone. It is not, therefore, a “chauvinistic” or “optimistic” image; but a view of America as one in a community of nations on or extending from the Atlantic Ocean, each of which has congenial and uncongenial aspects to the history and character of its peoples. The experience and force of bolshevism, Nazism, and Soviet communism pushed America

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<sup>45</sup> See J. David Hoeveler, Jr. *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America* (Charlottesville, VA, 1977), p. 185: “The intellectual movement that shows most clearly the extension or continuation of the Humanist critique is the New Conservatism that emerged after the Second World War. It too was a sustained effort to undo the effects of philosophical relativism and thus joined with other schools of thought in a wider pattern of criticism first articulated by the Humanists.... The New Humanists and the New Conservatives best document for the first time in American thought of a well-articulated philosophical or cultural conservatism in the tradition of Edmund Burke.” The principal New Conservatives indebted to Babbitt and More were Russell Kirk in *The Conservative Mind: Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, 1953) especially Chapter XII, “Critical Conservatism: Babbitt, More, Santayana,” pp. 362-397; and Peter Viereck in *Conservatism: From John Adams to Churchill* (New York, 1956), pp. 179ff.

<sup>46</sup> Boorstin, *America and the Image of Europe*, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> See Boorstin, *America and the Image of Europe*, pp. 32-33.

and Western Europe together in the mid-twentieth century. Their commonality rather than respective uniqueness was viewed as a positive source to secure future peace and prosperity for all Atlantic parties. The dominant faction of this “pluralist” understanding of America and its relation to Europe, as it turns out, is the Atlantic historians. Boorstin viewed his own works as contributing to this “pluralist” project and he should be considered as part of the founding generation of Atlantic historians.<sup>48</sup> But it is to Burke’s appropriative role in the creation of Atlantic history that we now turn.

It was in the context of the “pluralist” understanding of America’s relation to Europe that interest in Burke took a broader, more capacious American and Atlantic turn. Of course, the two early tendencies with regard to Burke, particularist and universalist, did not disappear entirely, and in important respects they were drawn upon and integrated into the new pluralist image of Burke, and in a larger context of Europe. Coincident to the emergence this pluralism, in 1940 the mass of Burke’s papers, only re-discovered in the 1930s among the Earls Fitzwilliam’s collection, were opened for scholarly examination in Sheffield, England.<sup>49</sup> This paved the way for a “Burke industry” within the larger field of eighteenth-century studies. Nearly 150 years after his death, Burke finally could be studied in a fuller context than had ever before been possible. The availability of these critical resources, then, nicely paralleled the larger reason for a revival of America’s interest in Edmund Burke: the circumstances or needs of the time and the movement toward a more complete, that is less distorted, image of an American-European future. To this end Atlantic history was a representative movement.

### III.

It is worth recalling that by 1945 America was outwardly bearing the mantle of its global responsibilities with greater confidence and ease, while inwardly it was exhibiting a war-weary anxiety that manifested itself in heightened fears about both economic dislocation and threats from a new enemy. Sensitive observers were struck, on the one hand, by the mounting expectations that indulgence, relativism, and secularism created. On the other hand, they sensed a mood of crisis that manifested itself in the popular belief that the

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<sup>48</sup> In this regard his book *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958) is a contribution.

<sup>49</sup> See Ross J. S. Hoffman, “The Wentworth Papers of Burke, Rockingham, and Fitzwilliam,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, volume 94 (1950), pp. 352-356.

most cherished values of Western civilization—which so many had recently died to defend—were in imminent danger of destruction. Such observers began, however, to perceive that these two developments were related. In both cases there was a deep perception that humanity was facing an epochal moment; there was a palpable sense that the world was collapsing.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there was a foreboding of cataclysm in the wake of the war and its dramatic closing scenes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Humanity saw itself perched right at the beginning of a new world. Nothing like 1945 had happened in world history.

With this recognition came a new openness to considering contemporary issues in a longer perspective. People looked at the world and wondered at the culture they had cut down and thus began to seek out ways to recover or re-grow it. Edmund Burke was one answer. In a world perceived to be collapsing, the recovery of order and tradition seemed a primary task. At a time when nationalist forces in America were battling for supremacy against more internationalist minded currents, it seemed for the latter group that drawing America closer to its European heritage was vital. This was the impulse that drew some thinkers back to Burke. Indeed, it is out of this admixture of fear and hope that the revival of interest in Burke and Atlantic history emerged with particular vitality among a group of American Catholic scholars, writers, and thinkers.

This convergence of Burke and Atlantic history can be traced coincidentally to the very day that Roosevelt died, April 12, 1945, when Ross Hoffman founded what was in retrospect an influential Edmund Burke Society at Fordham University.<sup>51</sup> Hoffman founded the Burke Society one month after publication of his *Thought* essay on the Atlantic Community's European legacy. The purpose of the Society was to achieve "recall to the principles, values, and traditions which are the heritage of the political and

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<sup>50</sup> James Agee, *TIME*, editorial, August 1945. John Lukacs: "In 1945 THE WIND carries centuries in its mane." *A Thread of Years* (New Haven, CT, 1998), p. 316.

<sup>51</sup> Hoffman had proposed the idea in the spring of 1945 to the Rev. Moorhouse F.X. Millar, S. J. then the head of Fordham's political science department. "Early in the spring of 1945 I proposed to Father Millar, head of the political science department, a joint meeting of our departments. This was the origin of what came to be called the Burke Society.... We met on April 12—the day Franklin Roosevelt died...." Hoffman, *Fordham Memoir*, September 3, 1973. Appropriately it was organized in New York. One hundred and seventy-five years earlier Burke commenced his service as parliamentary agent for the New York Colonial Assembly.

international society of Christendom.”<sup>52</sup> The results of the first meeting suggested that a central objective of the Society would be to consider European and American connections from a historical and theoretical perspective. And its first official act was to organize a conference around a new edition of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, in order to consider the contemporary merit of that illustrious European’s analysis. As Hoffman put it, “This admirable historian who had written (in the Age of Andrew Jackson) the most famous treatise on American democracy as well as democracy in Europe, perfectly represented the ideal we were striving to realize.... I chaired the meeting and made some introductory remarks on the value of Tocqueville’s thoughts to our time. Some five or six learned papers were presented.... It seemed that we had a workable idea and [in addition to historians and political scientists] the Burke Society soon drew in both philosophy and English literature.”<sup>53</sup> Hoffman later recounted the international as well as interdepartmental flavor of the Society’s gatherings: “So many fine Burke Society events, and so many grand parties given by [Fordham President] Father [Robert] Gannon at his office for the distinguished guests of the evening and the members of the Society. Who were these distinguished guests? Such men as Hugh Gibson, Herbert Hoover’s great friend and former Ambassador to Belgium; Carleton Hayes, Frank Sheed, Geoffrey Bruun, Walter C. Langsam, Tibor Eckhardt (former Hungarian Prime Minister) and so many others [including Evelyn Waugh].”<sup>54</sup> The members and guests of Fordham’s Burke Society were interested in establishing new transatlantic intellectual connections as much as they were in scholarly examinations of Burke’s philosophical and political career. The results, however, were scholarly and political.

For three years later, in 1948, Hoffman and fellow Fordham historian A. Paul Levack (1915-2002) released an influential new anthology of Burke’s political writings.<sup>55</sup> Their selections were designed “to show the operations of Burke’s mind, at its best.” They avoided abstraction, for, as they argued, “no *a priori* system of political ideas—no

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<sup>52</sup> Hoffman, *Fordham Memoir*, September 3, 1973. See also George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE, 1996), p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> Hoffman, *Fordham Memoir*, *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Fordham Memoir*, September 10, 1973.

<sup>55</sup> *Burke’s Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke on Reform, Revolution, and War* (New York, 1948).

ideology—governed his mind, but a passion to apprehend objective facts and circumstances.”<sup>56</sup> This inclination dominated Burke’s writings on colonial British America, the summary view of which the authors drew upon for present-day instruction. Indeed, in their substantial introduction to the volume, Hoffman and Levack directly drew out the historical and contemporary connections between “Burke’s Politics” and Atlantic history. “Our history,” they observed, “seems to lengthen as we grow aware of the ancestral inheritance that we share with older nations across the Atlantic, and of the heavy responsibilities that attach themselves to us.”<sup>57</sup> Burke’s vision of America’s place in this tradition is also made clear: “In the age of the American Revolution he had a fine vision of a great Atlantic world, which he desired to preserve in peace and union.... Burke looked upon Europe and saw there a universal similitude of religion, laws, and manners; America too, he said, was part of that moral and political order.”<sup>58</sup> Not surprisingly, Hoffman had applauded America’s entry in World War II on the side of Britain, for “America, vast reservoir of material might and hidden stores of loyalty to the good cause,” had rediscovered “her mission and sounds her battle cry.” The battle cry?: defense and preservation of the “good cause” of “the great republic,” which Hoffman located, as we have noted, “on what is now the inner sea of Christendom.”<sup>59</sup>

Hoffman’s great Atlantic republic was recognized to be a past and present reality and thus seized upon and developed into a full theoretical basis for a new American foreign policy by Walter Lippmann (1899-1974). A prolific journalist and public political thinker, Lippmann had actually coined the phrase “Atlantic Community” in 1917 and was an early proponent of the need for the United States to enter World War I in an effort to defeat the Germans, who, Lippmann believed, were waging a war against the civilization of which America was a central part: the “Atlantic community.”<sup>60</sup> For Lippmann, North America was now the central region of the “Atlantic World,” and thus was largely responsible for its protection—which was, in turn, essentially the obligation of self-protection. His objective was not so much to make the world safe for democracy, as to

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<sup>56</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, p. vii

<sup>57</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, p. xxxv.

<sup>58</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, pp. xxxvi and xxxvii.

<sup>59</sup> Hoffman, *The Great Republic*, p. 162.

<sup>60</sup> Editorial, *New Republic*, “The Defense of the Atlantic World,” February 17, 1917.



make the Atlantic basin safe for “freedom of the seas” and American trade.<sup>61</sup> Lippmann was a severe critic of isolationism, but he was not an ideological interventionist. His interventionism was restrained by his sense of the relations between America and Europe, which was historic and concrete and not based on abstract universalist notions such as democracy or equality. Indeed, Lippmann reassessed his previous faith in democracy after World War II and became a critic of American liberalism. This philosophy of moderate interventionism Lippmann shared with Hoffman.<sup>62</sup> It is thus not surprising that during World War II these two figures would invoke each other in their writings about the Atlantic community. In his 1945 *Thought* essay on “The Atlantic Community” Hoffman appealed to Lippmann’s 1944 book, *U. S. War Aims*; he had done the same a year earlier in the pages of his book *Durable Peace*.<sup>63</sup> In *Durable Peace*, Hoffman devoted ten pages to a critical discussion of “the Lippmann thesis” followed by ten more pages yoking the concept of the “Atlantic Community” to the older concept of the “Great Republic.”<sup>64</sup> Bailyn, in his genealogy of “Atlantic History,” implies that Hoffman simply took his cue from Lippmann.<sup>65</sup> However, while Bailyn must be credited for recognizing Hoffman’s role in shaping the contours of Atlantic history, he does not go far enough in examining Hoffman’s writings and so got his sequencing wrong. The relationship between Hoffman and Lippmann was the opposite of what Bailyn supposed: it was Lippmann who took his cue from Hoffman. In this regard Bailyn overlooks two salient points of chronology. First, Hoffman employed the image of the Atlantic as an “inner sea” of Christendom and Western Civilization in his 1942 study.<sup>66</sup> Second, one year later, Lippmann borrowed that imagery and entitled a section of his treatment of the Atlantic

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<sup>61</sup> Editorial, *New Republic*, “America’s Part in the War,” February 10, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Hoffmann, like Lippmann, was as critical of what he called “super-internationalism” as he was of isolationism. See his *Durable Peace: A Study in American National Policy* (Oxford, 1944), p. vii.

<sup>63</sup> Hoffman, “The Atlantic Community,” p. 26; Hoffman, *Durable Peace*, pp. 96-116; Walter Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims* (Boston, 1944), p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> Hoffman: “With his sharply discerning eye, Mr. Lippmann has perceived the prime mission, the very *raison d’être*, of the alliance which the tide of the world events has forced upon Great Britain and the United States. It is to affirm the reality and come to the defense of that ‘great republic’ of free political societies, which is the international community grown from Western Christendom.” *Durable Peace*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>65</sup> Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Hoffman, *The Great Republic*, p. 162.

Community “The Inland Sea.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in a follow-up study of 1944, Lippmann explicitly credited Hoffman and his 1942 book *The Great Republic* for giving him a deeper historical appreciation of the nature of the “Atlantic Community” and the civilization of which it is part—especially Hoffman’s chapter on “The Rise of International Community,” which demonstrated, in Lippmann’s words, “the deeply settled objection of Western man through the centuries to a world state.”<sup>68</sup> For Lippmann, Hoffman had shown through his historical investigation that because the Atlantic or “Oceanic Community” is separated all throughout by water it “cannot be held together by military compulsion. It cannot be one military empire ruled from one capital. It can be only a concert of free nations held together by a realization of their common interests and acting together by consent.”<sup>69</sup> Bailyn only picks up this dialogue with Lippmann’s 1944 work and then Hoffman’s 1945 *Thought* essay. The point here is not merely to correct Bailyn, but to show that it was the historian Hoffman who helped to inform the public intellectual Lippmann’s more famous and celebrated notion of the Atlantic community. A contemporary historian and European émigré Oscar Halecki had a clearer understanding of this relationship:

This World War also put an end to the old idea of European leadership in the world. But that idea, too...had started to vanish long before.... The European community could no longer raise such a claim [to world leadership] because its internal unity had been destroyed, not only by international, but also by civil wars. These revolutions were, of course, primarily directed against a given form of national government.... The period of particularly frequent, violent, and widespread revolutionary movements in Europe which started with the French Revolution of 1789 reached its climax in the totalitarian revolutions of the twentieth century.... Long before the European Age had passed, European culture had spread over a whole continent beyond the Atlantic, and created such a close cultural community between the countries on both sides of that ocean, that Toynbee does not, as in other similar cases, distinguish the offshoot from the main body of the civilized society, which he continues simply to call “Western.” Furthermore, the provocative political discussions of Walter Lippmann and the penetrating historical discussions of Ross Hoffman have

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<sup>67</sup> Lippmann, pp. 134-136. The “nations of the New World are still vitally related to precisely those nations of the Old World from which they originated.... The Atlantic Ocean...is the inland sea of a community of nation allied with one another by geography, history, and vital necessity.”

<sup>68</sup> Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims*, p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims*, p. 78.

suggested, and gained acceptance for, the most convenient name of the new unit, which they call “the Atlantic community.”<sup>70</sup>

Hoffman and Lippmann thus shared an image of the Atlantic community and America’s historic place and current role within it, and of further significance this image was reinforced by a common source: Edmund Burke.<sup>71</sup> Like Hoffman, Lippmann turned to Burke for instruction, and especially to the Burkean idea of society as a “partnership” or contract between generations. That throughout his prolific career his writings are peppered with Burke evinces Lippmann’s continuous engagement with him.<sup>72</sup> And it is Burke, the custodian of European manners, mores, and inherited experience, the foe of naturalism, Rousseauistic sensibility, and modern sentimentality—as Lippmann would have learned from Babbitt—that appealed to him. Like Burke, Lippmann was resistant to labeling, a progressive whose belief in progress was tempered by an understanding that real progress cannot be achieved at the expense of a society’s moral, institutional, and philosophical inheritance. Both Burke and Lippmann were reformers, not radical innovators. “I hope and trust,” Lippmann once commented, “that I am a conservative who agrees with Edmund Burke. I believe in certain fundamental things in philosophy and constitutional law which are conservative against the Jacobins.”<sup>73</sup> And it was this “conservatism” that brought him to view the Atlantic Community much as Burke did during the American Revolution, as well as to understand Europe much in the way Burke did. “The national differences within the Atlantic region,” wrote Lippmann, “are variations within the same cultural tradition. For the Atlantic Community is the extension

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<sup>70</sup> Oscar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (New York, 1950), pp. 52-54.

<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, their appreciation of Burke was mediated by another shared figure: Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). At Harvard, Lippmann was a student of Babbitt’s (and, too, of another important American Burkean, George Santayana).<sup>71</sup> Babbitt, along with his friend the Princeton literary critic Paul Elmer More (1864-1937), fashioned a movement aiming to apply humanist standards of criticism to American cultural, intellectual, and political life. The so-called New Humanism was largely a reaction to uncritical American exceptionalism and what they contended were its many corrupting influences. They were opposed to what they believed was the leveling tendency of American democracy and mechanistic capitalism, the excesses of which were leading America, in their view, to mediocrity and dull uniformity. They looked to a European past and to European thinkers for diagnosis and prescription, their foremost political authority being Edmund Burke.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, see *New Republic*, “Books and Things,” August 7, 1915; *A Preface to Morals*, pp. 280-281; *The Good Society* (New York, 1936), pp. 28, 228, 253, 268, and 271-272; *The Public Philosophy* (New York, 1955), pp. 35, 80.

<sup>73</sup> Lippmann, *New Republic*, “The World We’re In,” an interview with Ronald Steel, April 14, 1974, p. 17.

of Western or Latin Christendom from the Western Mediterranean into the whole basin of the Atlantic Ocean.”<sup>74</sup>

That being said, however, Lippmann’s idea of the Atlantic community was conceived principally as a strategic basis for an American foreign policy, albeit one rooted in historic reality. He thus was interested in the political and economic system of America and Europe. Hoffman was interested in that, too, but as part of a larger, more deeply interconnected and dynamic cultural and religious reality. Indeed, Hoffman more than “grasped the Atlanticists’ underlying assumptions and implications,” as Bailyn contends,<sup>75</sup> he defined and shaped them as part of his own efforts to articulate a viable contemporary ideal of the great Atlantic and European republic. Hoffman was the first of what would become a wave of professional historians to do so. And both Hoffman and Lippmann were convinced Burkeans. Though it is important to note this important difference: Hoffman found in Burke a guiding spirit, and his mind was saturated with the totality of Burke’s writings, whereas Lippmann, a journalist and public controversialist, was a more occasional admirer who found in Burke inspiration for his own views on contemporary society. Moreover, in their respective emphases, Lippmann and Hoffman represented tendencies similar to those found in the eighteenth-century: public servants and thinkers viewing at one economic and political level the nature and desirability of a common “European system” and those reflective writers, historians, and statesman who operated on another level, perceiving and acting upon the understanding of a more profound cultural basis for the “commonwealth of Europe.”

Hoffman and Lippmann were not alone in viewing the Atlantic community of States as the “progeny of Western Christendom...that international community of which the Atlantic is the inland sea.”<sup>76</sup> Columbia historian Carlton J. H. Hayes (1882-1964), himself a prominent Catholic convert and friend of Hoffman, put Frederick Turner’s reigning frontier myth of American historiography into perspective in 1946 when he

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<sup>74</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, p. 87.

<sup>75</sup> Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Hoffman, “The Atlantic Community,” pp. 34, 35. More recently, J. H. Elliott made the same point from an Iberian (as opposed to British) Atlantic perspective: “The Atlantic began its historical existence as a European lake.” Elliott, “Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation,” in Armitage & Braddick, *The British Atlantic World*, p. 234.

famously asked, “The American Frontier: Frontier of What?”<sup>77</sup> Hayes was writing to professional historians as president of their guild and challenging them to “broaden their conception of the frontier and extend their researches and writings into a wider field.” He attacked their polar view of American history, their “exaggerated sense of American exceptionalism” in Bailyn’s words.<sup>78</sup> Specifically, he challenged historians to re-think the received understanding of the advancing frontier in North America and see it again as their earliest American forbears saw it: “as a frontier of Europe.”<sup>79</sup> “We used to know we were Europeans as well as Americans,” he lamented.<sup>80</sup>

Hayes argued that Americans were “modern Europeans living on the frontier of Europe.”<sup>81</sup> He characterized this insight as a historically “broad vision” and opposed it to the “restricted interpretation” of Turner, et al. Such a shallow and circumscribed view of America’s relationship to Europe was a principal cause, according to Hayes, of modern “isolationism.”<sup>82</sup> With Hoffman and Lippmann, Hayes argued that of the “Atlantic community and the European civilization basic to it, we Americans are co-heirs and co-developers, and probably in the future the leaders.”<sup>83</sup> And invoking his friend Hoffman specifically, Hayes argued that, “the Atlantic community has been an outstanding fact

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<sup>77</sup> Carlton J.H. Hayes, “The American Frontier: Frontier of What?” *American Historical Review* LI (1946), pp. 199-216. Interestingly, when Franklin Roosevelt named Hayes Ambassador of Spain, Hayes asked Hoffman to teach his modern European history courses at Columbia University until his return. “...when President Roosevelt sent [Hayes] to Spain in the dark days of 1942 [Hayes] had asked me to take over his work at Columbia...” Hoffman, *Fordham Memoir*, September 10, 1973. It was Hayes, too, who recommended to Alfred A. Knopf in the spring of 1946 that Hoffman was the “Burke afficianado” they should contract with to prepare a volume of Burke’s writings and speeches—the result was *Burke’s Politics*. Hoffman afterwards referred to Hayes as his “blessed benefactor,” and spoke of that recommendation and the resulting anthology as “one of those great turning points in life.” “[T]he proposal to undertake the Burke book came just at the time I had become disgusted with the kind of study that does not require close concentration upon men and concrete situations and circumstances. I had been obsessed for long with World War II and dismayed...by the virtual impossibility of ascertaining the inner springs of the conduct of contemporary public men.... Recent history no longer feed my appetite for reality.” *Fordham Memoir*, September 4, 1973.

<sup>78</sup> Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Hayes, “The American Frontier,” p. 200.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208. Hayes quotes Hoffman and Lippmann extensively and with approval throughout this paragraph, and indeed, throughout his famous essay. Specifically, he cites and draws upon Hoffman’s *The Great Republic*, his 1945 *Thought* essay, and *Durable Peace*. From Lippmann he sources *U.S. War Aims*.



and a prime factor of modern history,”<sup>84</sup> one primed now to take its “rightful place in an international regional community of which the Atlantic is the inland sea.”<sup>85</sup>

But if Jacobinism was the great threat to the unity of this civilization in Burke’s time, in Hayes’s it was late-nineteenth and twentieth-century nationalism. To what Hayes called the “Jacobin nationalism” of the First French Republic and Napoleonic Empire, Britain countered with a “traditional nationalism” articulated for it by Burke.<sup>86</sup> For Burke, Hayes argued, “the state was a permanent union whose ends could not be accomplished in any one generation.... The ‘people’—the nationality—were not distinct from their government, and they had no right to break the social tie which linked them to their forefathers.” Hayes singled out three aspects of Burke’s traditional nationalism for special emphasis and application: First, “Burke stressed and glorified the aristocratic, political nationalism of the British, and particularly the ‘British Constitution’ as the supreme embodiment of the ‘genius’ of the English nation and its historical experience.” Second, “Burke stands...as a pioneer in the exposition of the principle of nationality.... Nationality, according to Burke, does not signify a mere geographical entity or just an aggregate of individuals who happen at a given moment to live under common government. Nationality is a concrete expression of ‘continuity,’ of an extension of people in time as well as in numbers and space.” Third, “the traditional nationalism of Burke was not quite so exclusive or paramount as the contemporary nationalism of the Jacobins.... On the contrary, Burke advanced and pressed the idea of a hierarchy of loyalties, each supreme in its own sphere and all perfectly ‘natural,’ because all are ‘traditional.’ For example, a man should be loyal to his family...his locality or region...to the national state...to the world and humanity...to God.”<sup>87</sup> Hayes articulated themes relevant to this thesis regarding Burke’s movement from the particular to the universal, and captured Burke’s view of colonial America as participating in British nationalism as

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 213.

<sup>86</sup> Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York, 1931), see especially chapters three and four. Hayes: “Burke was an opponent of the impairment of any English rights,” Hayes noted. “He was against corruption in public office. He was against existing religious disabilities. He was against the slave trade. He was against any change in the British Constitution—first against any increase of royal authority, and afterwards against any decrease of aristocratic influence.... From all of which it is manifest that Burke, if temperamentally an ‘anti,’ was consistently an humanitarian.” (Pages 88-89.)

<sup>87</sup> Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, pp. 91-93. And, of course, those were the very sorts of loyalties the Jacobins condemned and tried to eradicate.

an expression of the “continuity” or accidental “extension” from Britain in time and space. Burke’s idea of the American national character is not reduced to geography merely, though, it will be argued, Burke was certainly aware of the central ways that differences in geography led to differences in the character or manners (and subsequently of important societal institutions) of peoples in Great Britain and America.

Fundamentally, then, for Hayes, Western or European civilization was a proxy for Christendom; or, in Hoffman’s nomenclature, “the Great Republic.”<sup>88</sup> Christianity was the substance of European history, identity, and consciousness. It was an inheritance of America as much as of the great nations of the continent. Hayes argued that this common civilization was linked to the United States in particular through “the Christian heritage [the first North American settlers] brought with them from Europe.” And, he believed, following Burke’s analysis in his *Speech on Conciliation*, that it was this common European culture, mediated through Britain’s historical experience and constitution, that “colonial Americans...were seeking in the American Revolution to conserve”; namely, “the traditional rights of free men against royal aggression. Such a people took to the ‘liberating’ doctrines of...an Edmund Burke...as easily as ducks to water.”<sup>89</sup>

In *Burke’s Politics*, Hoffman was equally committed to pointing out the contemporary relevance, even critical importance, of making this crucial link. He noted Burke’s own words in the *Regicide Peace*: “The writers on public law have often called this aggregate of nations a commonwealth. They had reason. It is virtually one great state, having the same basis of general law, with some diversity of provincial customs and local establishments.”<sup>90</sup> While, Hoffman acknowledged, Burke died when it seemed that this great commonwealth was shattered, it was partly restored in the nineteenth century and Burke’s wisdom was a source for its restoration.<sup>91</sup> But, in the aftermath of two world wars, by the late 1940s it seemed to Hoffman and many others who followed his ideas

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<sup>88</sup> Hoffman considered this work, *The Great Republic*, and his contributions to the journal *Thought* as elements in what he called a “crusade for right politics.” *Fordham Memoir*, August 23, 1973. Hayes also would publish a monograph with a comparable theme entitled *Christianity and Western Civilization* (Stanford, California, 1954).

<sup>89</sup> Hayes, *Christianity and Western Civilization*, pp. 16-17. This insight will be borne out when later in this thesis we consider colonial Americans’ image of Burke.

<sup>90</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>91</sup> For this development see *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Atlee, 1774-1947*, ed. George Bennett (London, 1953).

that “a vastly greater calamity has overwhelmed it, and no restoration has been accomplished. But the deepest instincts of our Republic lead us to set our hand to the task. If we are to succeed we shall have to find and follow leaders who possess something of Burke’s quality.” The charge, then, to scholars interested in forging comparative, trans-national connections between America and the larger Atlantic world was to “study our republican political society and the international community of Western Christendom in the same spirit, with the same passion for knowing reality, that animated Burke’s tireless effort to obtain practical understanding of his world.”<sup>92</sup>

At the vanguard of those American Catholic scholars who followed this advice were Francis Canavan, S.J. (1917- ), Carl B. Cone (1916-1995), Russell Kirk (1918-1994), Thomas Mahoney (1913-1997), Eugene McCarthy (1916-2006), Peter J. Stanlis (1920- ), and Francis Graham Wilson (1901-1976).<sup>93</sup> Dismayed by the drift of modern culture and politics, these Burkean Catholics pioneered efforts to find in the eighteenth-century statesman an “alternate source for a viable Anglo-American Catholic...tradition,” according to historian Patrick Allitt.<sup>94</sup> They found in Burke’s thought elements favorable to the Catholic natural law tradition. And they also believed that in important ways the *Federalist* authors represented for Americans what the Harvard historian Clinton Rossiter characterized as “a kind of collective Burke.”<sup>95</sup> As such, these Catholic intellectuals saw in Burke a powerful means by which to explicate the enduring American Catholic question: namely, the compatibility of Catholicism with American political institutions and traditions. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, Francis Graham Wilson argued in the Jesuit-edited journal *Social Order* that in their pursuit of perennial principles to apply to their

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<sup>92</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>93</sup> See in this regard, Francis Canavan, S.J., *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, NC, 1960); Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics*, two volumes (Lexington, KY, 1957 and 1964); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, 1953); Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge, MA, 1960); Eugene J. McCarthy, *Frontiers in American Democracy* (Cleveland, OH, 1960); Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1957); Francis Graham Wilson, *The Case for Conservatism* (Seattle, WA, 1951).

<sup>94</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), p. 223.

<sup>95</sup> Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion*, second revised edition (New York, 1962), p.

understanding of the American political order, “It is no doubt to Burke...that a Catholic must turn.”<sup>96</sup>

However, if American intellectual and political life in the wake of World War II was becoming more Europeanized, it also witnessed, perhaps in reaction, a revival of anti-Catholicism—a lasting quality America inherited from the British.<sup>97</sup> Ongoing anti-Catholic suspicion produced a keen awareness among Burkean Catholics that, as Patrick Allitt noted, “an explicitly Catholic political tradition was unlikely to rally a nation with Puritan origins, for which anti-Popery was a foundational myth.” Consequently, it became an essential task to locate transitional figures “that could bridge the Protestant-Catholic gulf and embody the ideals of the Great Republic and the natural law in a way acceptable to America’s non-Catholic majority.”<sup>98</sup> To this end Burke was an obvious candidate. Burke’s Irishness was a benefit, for it would have made him all the more appealing to the nearly 2.5 million Irish-Americans in 1945, many of whom were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the Democratic party. Irish Americans played a conspicuous role in the American Catholic Church, too; they dominated the hierarchy and filled out the priestly ranks, and due to their experiences in Ireland with the Protestant established church, they were particularly predisposed to American institutional arrangements and practices. They would have appreciated both Burke’s defense of Irish Catholics and the American Colonies. “There is no doubt,” Hoffman declared, “that the whole Western world, and especially our own Republic, can drink healthfully from the fountain of wisdom that gushed forth from this man and will not run dry as long as his masterpieces remain in the libraries of civilization.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Francis Graham Wilson, “Catholics and ‘the New Conservatism,’” *Social Order*, June 1956, p. 248.

<sup>97</sup> For recent scholarship on this persistent phenomenon in America’s cultural and intellectual life see Mark S. Massa, S. J., *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York, 2003) and Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford, 2003). The chief figure in reviving old prejudices and suspicions during this period was the journalist Paul Blanshard, principally through his book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston, 1949), but also through the sequel, *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power* (Boston, 1951). In the former anti-Catholic polemic, Blanshard argued to a broad audience that the Pope controlled the ultimate allegiance of American Catholics, while in the latter he analogized Catholicism with communism.

<sup>98</sup> Patrick Allitt, “Ross Hoffman and the Transformation of American Catholic Historiography,” an unpublished paper delivered to the American Catholic Historical Association meeting on April 5, 1991—in the possession of this author with the generous permission of Professor Allitt to quote from it.

<sup>99</sup> Hoffman, *Burke’s Politics*, pp. xxxiv.

Burke was especially suitable to these Catholic thinkers because his friendliness to the American cause in the 1770s and antipathy to the French revolutionary movement of the 1790s made for an easy transference to American movements that opposed Russian communism, which, they argued, was a direct descendent of French Jacobinism.<sup>100</sup> Beyond that it did not escape these American Catholic thinkers that Burke, of course, championed the Catholic cause at great political risk in a Protestant and deeply anti-Catholic land. Indeed, thinkers from Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) to Conor Cruise O'Brien (1917- ) have held that there is a centrality to Burke's thought that has a Catholic aspect to it. In the hands of these post-war Catholic Burke scholars such as Ross Hoffman, this recognition allowed them, in Allitt's estimation, to "do in the realm of history what John Courtney Murray, S.J. accomplished in the realm of theology; prepare the way for an era of religious comity without yielding Catholic theoretical ground."<sup>101</sup>

Such an appropriation of Edmund Burke by Catholics seeking to prove the compatibility of Catholicism with American political institutions and traditions was not an entirely new phenomenon. Burke was the subject of several inter-war period essays in leading Catholic publications, and he informed the political analysis of many others, particularly the efforts of Hoffman's Fordham colleague, the political scientist and Jesuit Moorhouse F.X. Millar (1886-1956), to set forth Catholic teaching concerning the state in

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<sup>100</sup> The American Catholic response to communism was related to the rise of interest in Edmund Burke in post-war America. As Patrick Allitt has observed, "the issue of anti-communism provided the perfect rallying point for Catholics seeking to demonstrate their right to a central place in the national community...." Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America* (Ithaca, 1993), p. 20. However, while Burke's writings against French Jacobinism are usually cited as the source for American conservative and Catholic interest in Burke, the truth is more complicated; for the revival of interest in Burke in these quarters precedes the Cold War and, in fact, the Second World War itself. And it is the "American Revolution" Burke as much as the "French Revolution" Burke that is the initial focus of their attention.

<sup>101</sup> Allitt, "Transformation of American Catholic Historiography." Murray (1904-1967) himself invoked Burke in the pages of his influential work interpreting the nature of the American experiment, *We Hold These Truths*, wherein he considered the theoretical problem of securing both civil unity and religious integrity in a religiously plural society. *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York, 1960), pp. 46-47. Suggestively, Murray invokes Burke on a controversial point in Burke scholarship: the nature of Burke's endorsement of state established religion [See J.C.D. Clark, *English Society: 1688-1832*, second edition (Cambridge, 2000), especially Section Three, "National Identity: The Matrix of Church and State, 1760-1815"] and its application to an American Catholic understanding of the First Amendment, the "political and legal solution to the problem created by the plurality of religious beliefs in American society." His book appeared in the same year that America elected its first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), who found an attractive model in the theory of representation Burke forged as a result of the pressure brought to bear on him as a pro-American representative from the commercial city of Bristol during the Revolution. See *Profiles in Courage* (New York, 1955; commemorative edition, 1998), pp. 29, 186.



an American, neo-Thomistic, and democratic context.<sup>102</sup> The flowering of Catholic interest in Burke as the representative figure of transnational or Atlantic political history could draw from American roots that extended back into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Burke was frequently the subject of interest in leading Catholic journals of opinion such as *Catholic World* and the *American Catholic Quarterly*.<sup>103</sup> Of course, as with Hoffman and Lippmann, there commingled in such publications two varieties of Burkeans: one that used Burke for the apt occasion or quote and another that invoked him as a touchstone.

But for contemporary modes of writing in the school of Atlantic history, it is the frequency and importance of Edmund Burke's employment in Catholic writing in the 1940s and early 1950s to which it owes its origins. Bailyn is the first to notice a connection between Catholicism and the rise of Atlantic history. There has been a greater degree of scholarly awareness to the movement of Evangelical revivalism across the Atlantic when dispossessed Protestants groups who found themselves on the wrong side of the Treaty of Westphalia moved across the Atlantic to America.<sup>104</sup> Bailyn, however, though principally interested in the Protestant Atlantic, is aware of the degree to which Catholicism also spread westward across the ocean. What he has not noticed is that Catholic intellectuals working to outline the contours of Atlantic history in the mid-twentieth century were not trying to forge eighteenth-century links with Protestant revivalism, but instead looked to Burke with a Catholic shade.

In these turbulent years Americans were coming more fully to appreciate that their roots as a nation were sunk deep in European soil, specifically English-speaking Europe.

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<sup>102</sup> Millar was probably the preeminent interwar period figure laboring to forge associations between Catholic social teaching and eighteenth-century American political philosophy in an effort to establish a Catholic basis for America's founding documents and a Catholic influence, however indirectly, on the thought of America's principal founders. For a comprehensive list of Millar's essays to this end see the tribute issue of *Thought*, volume xxix, number 112, Spring, 1954. On Burke's central role in this project see John A. Ryan and Moorhouse F.X. Millar, *The State and the Church* (New York, 1922), pp. 99-194; Millar, "Burke and the Moral Basis of Political Liberty," *Thought*, XVI, 1941, pp. 71-101.

<sup>103</sup> For example, see "Burke and Revolution," *Catholic World*, XX, March 1875, pp. 823-832; George McDermott, "Edmund Burke, The Friend of Human Liberty," *Catholic World*, LXV, July 1897, pp. 473-81; J. J. O'Shea, "The Reflections on the Centenary of Edmund Burke," *American Catholic Quarterly*, XXII, 1897, pp. 517-530; Alfred G. Bickel, "Cardinal Newman and Edmund Burke," *Catholic World*, CIX, August 19, 1905, pp. 637-645; W. F. P. Stockley, "Edmund Burke on Religion and the Church," *American Catholic Quarterly*, XXXI, 1906, pp. 61-80; and Denis Gwynn, "To the Beginners the Glory: Edmund Burke and Catholic Emancipation," *Catholic World*, CXXVIII, 1929, pp. 385-396.

<sup>104</sup> See especially W. R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge, 2006).

Historians were, of course, reflecting this shift; and the view that America could claim little as its own—especially its language and traditions of law, literature, and liberty—was gained ground accordingly. Books addressing the creation of an Atlantic civilization proliferated, including multiple volumes on the topic by City College of New York historian Michael Kraus (1901-1990) and Folger Library Director Louis Wright (1899-1964) among others.<sup>105</sup> And so by 1965, the author of a major study of religion in America, Winthrop S. Hudson (1911-2001) could write, “After a long period in which historians have emphasized the uniqueness of almost everything American, it is becoming increasingly clear that the United States can properly be understood only as an integral part of a larger European society. Our roots as a nation go back to the remarkable burst of colonizing activity which transformed the Atlantic Ocean into the *Mare Nostrum* of western Europe.”<sup>106</sup> Britain, Hudson argued in language reminiscent of Hoffman, had always been the “bridge” between the old world and the new. As John Tracy Ellis (1905-1992) observed, “Apace with the influence exercised by other national strains in the generation of American civilization, the British has yet remained the strongest and has assimilated most of the others.”<sup>107</sup>

The American experience, of course, had modified and gradually developed the cultural legacy transmitted from across the Atlantic. For although it could now be argued that in the principal areas of its common life, Americans have been and “continued to be part of a larger European society,” it remains true that, in Hudson’s words, “The recognition that the United States, . . . save its geographic location, is a part of Europe must not obscure the parallel fact the we are Americans as well as Europeans. European society has never been a monolithic whole. Within the common culture, there have

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<sup>105</sup> Kraus in 1949: “The concept of the Atlantic Community is much in evidence in our present day consciousness.” Michael Kraus, *The Atlantic Civilization: Eighteenth Century Origins* (New York, American Historical Association, 1949), p. vii, and also *The North Atlantic Civilization* (New York, 1957), both emphasize especially the impact of America on Europe. Louis Wright, *The Atlantic Frontier: Colonial American Civilization, 1607-1763* (Ithaca, New York, 1947), *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (Bloomington, Ind., 1955), and *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607-1763* (New York, 1957) are still useful narratives on the economic, intellectual, political, and social settlement of colonial British America. And appropriately, both scholars make use of Burke in this regard. See also, John Bartlet Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States, and Great Britain* (New Haven, 1945).

<sup>106</sup> Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* (New York, 1965), p. 3. Hudson attributes his own views in this respect to the work of Carlton Hayes.

<sup>107</sup> John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago, 1955), p. 20.

always been diverse local and national traditions; and this is as true in America as it is in England and France and Germany.”<sup>108</sup> And it was through Burke that many thinkers, especially those identified in the 1950s as “new conservatives” and who were indebted to Hoffman’s contributions, sought to locate a viable Anglo-American political tradition and reconcile what is unique about American ideals and institutions to what they saw as being in continuity with older, European traditions.<sup>109</sup>

To thinkers like Hoffman the advent of the Second World War proved that, by default, the tradition of Christendom had fallen to the British.<sup>110</sup> By the end of that global conflict, it was clear that America had assumed a large portion of the duty to protect the vestiges of a common Christian civilization in the West seemingly under relentless siege from the forces of the modern world. Ross Hoffman passionately articulated this view in the introduction to *Burke’s Politics*. America, he contended, stood at the war’s end

politically, economically, and morally, at the head of the Western world. The heights are dizzying and we are not only astonished but alarmed at the spectacle presented to our eyes. Until recently we had always thought of ourselves as a new people, severed from an old world and founders of a new one. But now the perspective is altered. Our history seems to lengthen as we grow more aware of the ancestral inheritance that we share with older nations across the Atlantic, and of the heavy responsibilities that attach themselves upon us. We look into and reexamine ourselves. We contrast the freedom and richness of our life and the durability of our institutions, with the slavery, poverty, and abject ruin that have overtaken states and peoples in Europe. We begin to be awed by what appears as a wonderful work of wisdom built in obedience to the rules of Providence. We grow in appreciation of it and determination to conserve it. American democracy, organized in a republican representative government under a constitution a century and a half old, no longer appears as a revolutionary challenge to an old order, but as a majestic creation of the ages and the citadel of prescriptive right in Western Christendom.<sup>111</sup>

America, then, was part of a larger moral and political order, a “common political civilization of Europe;” but there was a special affinity between America and Britain, and

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<sup>108</sup> Hudson, *Religion in America*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>109</sup> Russell Kirk is emblematic here. He was a friend and frequent correspondent of Hoffman’s. See Kirk’s memoir, *The Sword of Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), pp. 82, 148, 185, 187, 440.

<sup>110</sup> This very Anglo-centric view of the future of Europe and Christianity is all the more interesting as by at least 1946 Catholic thinkers could not have failed to notice that the aftermath of the war had created by accident something akin to a Catholic Europe with DeGaulle and Shumann in France; DeGaspari in Italy; Franco in Spain; Salazar in Portugal; and Adenauer in Germany.

<sup>111</sup> *Burke’s Politics*, p. xxxv.

the mid-century the air was permeated with the profound sense that America's was at bottom a British culture. After all, observed Louis Wright, "we cannot escape an inheritance which has given us some of our sturdiest and most lasting qualities."<sup>112</sup>

Atlantic history is one concept within the academic community that is open to viewing the Atlantic Ocean the way Burke and his American appropriators have: as the "inland sea of Western Civilization." D. W. Meinig, the prominent modern geographer and Atlanticist, borrows that exact phrase in generalizing about the "sectors and circuits" of the broad Atlantic world.<sup>113</sup> As such, Atlantic history may well prove a vehicle both to restore balance to the American and European view of each other by fostering a deeper appreciation of their shared past and—for better or for worse—their common destiny. In doing so, Atlantic historians will benefit from tending to their deeper eighteenth-century roots by encouraging the study of such figures as Edmund Burke. In the case of Burke, a commensurable American and European "public philosophy" as Walter Lippmann once conceived might be leavened once again by the fresh Atlantic perspective of scholars in this field. To these ends, this thesis modestly aspires to contribute.

Is it ironic or suggestive that American Catholics, with the aid of classical or Christian humanists, sought to build historiographic bridges between English-speaking Europe and America by focusing on Edmund Burke? The pivotal figure in that project, Burke throughout his life was himself dogged by rumors about the nature of his attachment to the cause of Catholic enfranchisement and toleration and by accusations of being a crypto-Catholic. The modern American Burke scholars discussed above have in no way intimated that Burke was secretly a confessional papist; for the evidence, they acknowledge, points to quite the opposite conclusion. He was a high-church, theologically latitudinarian Anglican.<sup>114</sup> But his ecclesiastical affiliation has not proven a hindrance to his American Catholic admirers. To the contrary, it has made him even more attractive to modern Catholic historians trying to find a theoretical place and tradition for Catholicism within Protestant America.

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<sup>112</sup> Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier*, p. 114.

<sup>113</sup> D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America, Volume I: Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven, 1986), p. 65.

<sup>114</sup> See Lock, "Burke and Religion," in Crowe, ed., *An Imaginative Whig*.

Burke's American sympathies were rooted in his personal and political interest in the plight of subjugated Irish Catholics.<sup>115</sup> In that sense, Burke the "friend of America" was an extension of Burke the "friend of Catholics." One might also say that Burke the "friend of America" is a consequence of Burke the "friend of Europe." In the twentieth century, American Catholics turned to Burke the historic friend of both their country and their confessional cause to foster a burgeoning school of American historiography which, owing to its intrinsic merits, has flourished in the historical profession far beyond Burke and Catholic circles. The revival of interest in Burke, then, is part of the "story," as Bernard Bailyn put it, "that winds through the public life of the late twentieth century, through the interior impulses of technical scholarship, and through the social situation of those who write history."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> It should be noted here that the evidence for Burke being internally Irish Catholic was not well understood to the Catholics Burkeans of the mid-twentieth century. It was generally known but scarcely analyzed even in Ireland until Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody* appeared.

<sup>116</sup> Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, p. 4.





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